NATION

WB women prisoners give birth to 196 babies

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BUSINESS

RBI projects 7% growth for next financial year

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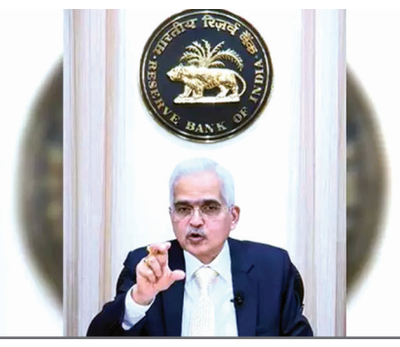

SPORTS

Djokovic set for Indian Wells return after 5 years

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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PHOTO: FB

Sena (UBT) leader's son shot during Facebook live

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Vinod Ghosalkar's son Abhishek Ghosalkar was injured when unidentified persons opened fire on him here on Thursday evening, police said. A `Facebook live' video of the incident, which showed Abhishek, a former corporator, being shot in the abdomen and shoulder, went viral on social media. The incident took place in the limits of MHB Colony police station in Dahisar area, said an official. Abhishek was rushed to hospital and was undergoing treatment, he said.—*PTI*

India to replace military personnel in Maldives

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

India will replace its military personnel operating three aviation platforms in the Maldives with "competent" Indian technical personnel, said External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal. Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu said the first group of Indian military personnel will be sent back before 10 March and the remaining manning ones will be withdrawn before 10 May, on Monday. The second meeting of core group took place in Delhi on 2 February. At present, around 80 Indian military personnel are in Maldives primarily to operate two helicopters and an aircraft which carried out hundreds of medical evacuations and humanitarian missions. The ties between two countries came under some strain since he came to power in November. —*PTI*

'RBI to introduce offline e-rupee transactions soon'

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

Digital rupee users will soon be able to execute transactions in areas with limited internet connectivity as the Reserve Bank of Inida (RBI) on Thursday announced that offline capability will be introduced on the Central bank digital currency (CBDC) pilot project. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said that programmability-based additional use cases will be introduced as part of the pilot project. RBI launched a pilot of the retail CBDC in December 2022 and achieved the target of having 10 lakh transactions a day in December 2023. —*PTI*

Noida farmers hold protest march amid heavy security

NOIDA, 8 FEB

Noida Police on Thursday stepped up security along its borders with Delhi as thousands of farmers from around 100 villages took to the streets seeking hiked compensation and made an unsuccessful bid to march towards Parliament. Ahead of the protest by the farmers in Noida and Greater Noida, the Gautam Buddh Nagar Police had already imposed CrPC Section 144 for Wednesday and Thursday. Barricades were set up at Chilla border with Noida Police on one side and Delhi Police on the other side to prevent protesters, who started their march from Mahamaya Flyover here around 12 pm, from entering the national capital.—*PTI*

IT'S BJP'S WHITE PAPER VS CONGRESS' BLACK PAPER

The parties accuse each other of economic mismanagement

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

A 'White Paper' versus 'Black Paper' battle erupted on Thursday as the Centre and Congress unveiled documents and crossed swords over the handling of the Indian economy during the 10 years of BJP-led NDA rule and the previous 10-year tenure of the Congress-led UPA government respectively.

As the rival multi-party alliances sought to put the spotlight on economic issues just ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took a jibe at Congress for coming out with a "Black Paper" on the NDA government, calling it a "kaala teeka"(black dot) that will ward off the evil eye on the achievements of his government.

While the NDA government's White Paper said the Indian economy was on "road to nowhere" in 2014 because of the multiple wrong turns taken during the UPA rule, Congress' Black Paper highlighted "failures" of the Modi government and said the last 10 years have been a period of "injustice".

The White Paper was tabled in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge releases 'Black Paper' against the Modi government ***PHOTO: PTI***

BJP is likely to launch a nationwide campaign around the White Paper as it believes that the issue will resonate with the masses in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls and reinforce its message about Prime Minister Modi's able leadership and the ineptness of the Congress and its allies.

The Centre's 54-page document said the Modi government after assuming power in 2014 took "tough decisions" to overcome the "hydra-headed challenges" of runaway fiscal deficit, decision stasis, banking crisis, corruption and scams.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge 54-page 'chargesheet' titled '10 saal anyay kaal' attacked Centre over unemployment, price rise, farmers' distress, failure to carry out a caste census and injustice to women just ahead of the government's tabling in Parliament of the 'White Paper'.

The White Paper saying it had turned the Indian economy into a non-performing one through indiscriminate revenue expenditure, off budget borrowings and pile of bad debts at banks. —*PTI*

MODI HAILS MANMOHAN'S CONTRIBUTION

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Bidding farewell to members retiring from the Rajya Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday lauded the contribution of his predecessor Manmohan Singh to the House and the country, and said he will be remembered whenever democracy is discussed. Singh, he noted, came to vote in the Rajya Sabha on a wheelchair to help strengthen democracy.

As he gave his best wishes to the retiring members, he expressed the hope that they will scale new heights after getting educated in this 'eternal university'.He also hoped that the country and the new generations would benefit from their experience. Modi said, "I would especially like to remember Manmohan Singh ji. For six times he has been a member of this House and has made a huge contribution to this House with his valuable thoughts." —*PTI*

EYES ON POLLS

TDP Prez Naidu meets Amit Shah, likely to join BJP

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Telugu Desam Party President N Chandrababu Naidu met Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP President JP Nadda late Wednesday night amid indications that the two parties may join hands in Andhra Pradesh for upcoming polls.

Lok Sabha and assembly polls will be held simultaneously in the state.

Naidu met Shah at the Home Minister's residence, with sources saying that Nadda was also present in the meeting. If Naidu returns to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, he will be the second major regional leader to have done so after Janata Dal (United) president and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar snapped ties with the opposition and joined its fold last month.

The TDP President and former Andhra Pradesh chief minister, sources said, is keen to join hands with the BJP and a section in the ruling party believes that an alliance with Naidu will help the NDA do well in the state ruled by the YSR Congress.

Chandrababu Naidu ***PHOTO: PTI***

Naidu in the NDA will help the ruling alliance boost its tally, they said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had recently asserted in Parliament that his party will get 370 seats and the NDA will cross 400 in the polls, expected in April-May, to the 543-member House. A senior BJP leader said his party is open to an alliance but it will all depend on how many seats the TDP, the main opposition party in the state, agrees to give it, especially for the Lok Sabha polls.

Both had fought the 2014 polls together when Telangana was yet to be formally separated from Andhra Pradesh. The BJP had then fought three seats and won all of them out of the 42 seats in the united state. —*PTI*

CM orders CID probe into Parashuram theme park issue

MANGALURU, 8 FEB

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has ordered a CID investigation into the alleged irregularities in setting up the Parashurama theme park at Bailur in Udupi district during the previous government's tenure. The theme park row had led to a series of protests with allegations that the towering statue of Parashurama was not made of bronze as claimed by its promoters. Several Congress leaders from the Karkala constituency had made several allegations against the theme park and the statue of Parasurama which was allegedly not made of bronze as claimed.

The district in-charge minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar on 2 February, urged Siddaramaiah to conduct a thorough investigation into the reported irregularities in construction. The park, which was the dream project of Karkala MLA and former minister V Sunil Kumar, was declared open months before the last Assembly elections amid the controversy.

Parashurama theme park ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

Sunil Kumar MLA, in a statement, welcomed the CID probe ordered by the government on the theme park issue. "The investigation will put a full stop to all the rumours and false charges made out by certain sections," he said. Kumar said he had demanded an inquiry into the matter six months ago. He wanted the government to complete the probe and release the remaining amount allotted for the park by BJP government.

Inaugurated in 2023 by former Chief Minister Basavaraja Bommai at a cost of Rs 15 crores, the theme park aimed to feature a statue of Parashurama along with amenities such as an open-air theatre, art gallery, and bhajan hall. —*Salar News with Agencyv*

'ILLEGALLY BUILT'

DEMOLITION OF MADRASA SPARKS VIOLENCE IN U'KHAND

HALDWANI, 8 FEB

A curfew was imposed here on Thursday as violence erupted in the city's Banbhoolpura area over the demolition of an "illegally built" madrasa, officials said.

Local residents pelted stones at police and torched vehicles here after authorities demolished the madrasa that was built on government land, they said. At least 60 people injured during the incident. The madrasa demolition took place after a prior notice to the residents, according to SSP Prahlad Meena.

People living around the madrasa hurled stones at the police personnel and journalists, leaving some injured, Meena said. The protestors also set vehicles on fire, he added.

He said the madrasa stood on an "illegally encroached government land".The demolition was carried out in the presence of Municipal Commissioner Pankaj Upadhyay, City Magistrate Richa Singh, SDM Paritosh Verma, he added. —*PTI*

Heavy machinery being used to demolish a madrasa, in Haldwani, Uttarakhand. ***PHOTO: PTI***

METRO PHASE 2 REACH 6 LINE TO OPEN IN 2025

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

The Reach 6 line of Namma Metro's Phase 2, connecting Kalena Agrahara to Nagawara, will be operational by 2025, said Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar here.

Under the Pink Line of the phase 2 project, major stations such as Jayadeva Hospital, MG Road, Cantonment and Nagavara will serve as key interchanges, Shivakumar said at the breakthrough ceremony of the tunnel boring machine 'Bhadra' at KG Halli Metro Station on Thursday.

"The Pink Line will have 12 stations and nearly 75 per cent of the work is completed. We have installed nine tunnel drilling machines, out of which seven are nearing completion." —*Salar News*

Govt suspends Free Move Regime with Myanmar

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said the Centre has decided to scrap the India-Myanmar Free Movement Regime (FMR). This is to maintain the country's internal security and demographic structure of the northeastern states.

The announcement came two days after Shah said India has decided to fence the entire 1,643-km-long India-Myanmar border.

The India-Myanmar border, which passes through Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, currently has FMR. It was implemented in 2018 as part of India's Act East policy.

Fencing along the border has been a persistent demand of the Imphal valley-based Meitei groups which have been alleging that tribals often enter into India through the porous border.

Manipur has been witnessing sporadic violence. Ethnic violence broke out in Manipur on 3 May , 2023 after a tribal solidarity march was organised in the hill districts to protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status.

Since then over 200 people have been killed in the continuing violence. While a section of Kukis have demanded a separate administration or separation from the Manipur government, the Meitei groups are dead against it and warned legislators against any such design and asked them to foil such attempts.

The Meitei groups also allege that narcotics are being smuggled into India taking advantage of the unfenced international border. Meanwhile, two pilot projects of fencing through a hybrid surveillance system are under execution.

Manipur shares around 390 km of porous border with Myanmar, but only about 10km has been fenced so far. —*PTI*

After K'taka, Ker govt protests in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Several INDIA bloc constituents Thursday rallied around the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government of Kerala as Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan led a protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar against the Centre alleging democracy envisaged as a union of states is being "crippled" by its "undemocratic Union over states mentality".

While leaders from AAP, DMK and NC were among those present, no one from Congress was there.

Congress-led UDF Opposition in Kerala which was invited to join the protest had declined it saying it does not agree with the Left narrative blaming the Centre. Attacking the Centre, Vijayan criticised the "Union over states mentality" of the Centre, saying it is not only manifested in financial matters, but was evident in the functioning of Governors in Opposition-ruled states as well.

"We have all come together to register our strong protest against this and to preserve the federal structure of India," he said.

He alleged that in opposition-ruled states, governors are disrupting the state government's work, with a 'Union over states' mentality. "We have seen gubernatorial excesses in Punjab, West Bengal, Odisha, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and so on.—*PTI*

K'TAKA MP SUMALATHA MEETS JP NADDA AMID SPECULATIONS

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Independent Lok Sabha MP and actor Sumalatha Ambareesh on Thursday met BJP national President JP Nadda and party general secretary (organisation) BL Santhosh giving rise to speculations about her pitching for a BJP ticket.

Sumalatha has been cozying up to the BJP and is aspiring for a ticket from the party, sources close to her said, adding that she has kept her options open in case she is rebuffed.

She had said that some senior Congress leaders were also in touch with her. Mandya constituency has become a contentious issue for BJP, its alliance partner Janata Dal (S), Sumalatha for the upcoming Lok Sabha election, which is about two months away. —*Salar News*

IT IS DIGITAL ERA

State Cabinet accepts online registration of marriages

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

State Cabinet on Thursday approved Special Marriage Karnataka Amendment Rules, 2024, which will allow marriage registration through e-mail.

Under this, one can now register marriages online using Kaveri 2.0 portal of the Department of Stamps and Registrations. The Cabinet, which held a meeting in Vidhana Soudha, has also withdrawn Fixation of Sale Price of Cotton Seeds and Payment of Compensation Bill, 2015. The Cabinet has also resolved to fill the vacancy of upper-level posts--that now stands at 45 per cent--through the Karnataka Administrative Services Recruitment Amendment Rules, 2024. State has allotted Rs 148 crore for clean drinking water under Jal Jeevan mission Kalaburgi. Belagavi received Rs 114 crore for the same. State granted 39 acres of land for a government university in Hubballi.

PHOTO: X

It will also give 34,000 tool kits to SC/ST students at the cost of Rs 28.28 crore. Kalaburagi will also get Rs 36 crore for a cancer ward with 150 new beds, and 18 medical colleges and 114 modular operation theatres will also come up in the State. The Cabinet has also approved Rs 193 crore to be provided by the Centre for building Unity Mall spanning 6.5 acres in Mysuru. Congress approved a new court complex comprising four halls in Bidar to be built at an estimated cost of Rs 17.50 crore. The government will also give 25,380 smartphones costing Rs 89.61 crore to Anganwadi workers. The State is also planning to start 104 emergency healthcare services at 28 call centres. It also gave Rs 10.5 crore to make regional driving training centres for women at Bidadi, Ramanagara and Hubballi. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Teen girl dies due to dengue in Chikkamagaluru

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

An 18-year-old college student, Suhana Bhanu, died due to dengue fever at MalleGowda District Hospital in Chikkamagaluru on Thursday. The death of the teen has sparked concerns among locals, who pointed out the unhygienic conditions in the locality attributed to incomplete work on the underground drainage system in Mohammad Khan Lane in Chikkamagaluru. The locality protested in front of the civic body to address the unhygienic conditions yet the problem remained unsolved. According to the data by the State health department there are 93,027 active cases of dengue across the State as of January. Among them Gadag has the highest number of the dengue reported cases of 48,987.

—Salar News

Another case of monkey fever reported in State

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

A 55-year-old female patient from Koppal has been reported with the Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), also known as monkey fever, on Thursday. Currently the Koppal district has reported a total of nine cases of monkey fever in the district. In response to the growing concern, the health department of Koppal has taken proactive measures and a dedicated ward has been established at Koppal government hospital to provide specialised care for patients affected by monkey fever. Currently the monkey fever has claimed two lives in Karnataka and the State has reported 49 cases since 1 January.

—Salar News

PHOTO: SALAR

Congress student wing protests against FM

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

The National Students' Union of India (NSUI), the student wing of the Indian National Congress, protested against Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday in front of her office in Millers Road. They painted black paint on the nameplate of Sitharaman to vent their anger. The protesters held placards and shouted slogans against the Members of Parliament of the State. The protesters were arrested by Vidhana Soudha police. The protest was held against Sitharaman for not allocating a fair share to the State. Government claimed that the centre owes Rs 1.87 lakh crores including taxes, GST and grants. Sitharaman said that the government used its share of money on guarantee schemes. *—Salar News*

Special train to Ayodhya via Mangaluru

MANGALURU, 8 FEB

A special train service to Ayodhya Ram Mandir via Mangaluru departs from Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, on Thursday. Train No. 06517 Coimbatore-Darshan Nagar-Coimbatore Aastha, will reach Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, and travels to Ayodhya junction via Mangaluru Junction Railway Station. Train is scheduled to arrive at Darshan Nagar Railway Station, Ayodhya, on 11 February early morning. The return journey will commence from Ayodhya at 8am on 12 February, and will reach Mangaluru Junction on 14 February evening, said railway sources.

—PTI

Mercy death to loan plea: CM hears it all at Janaspandana 2.0

Over 12,372 aggrieved people registered their complaints

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday personally met people with disabilities, the elderly, farmers, and women to hear their grievances during the redressal programme "Janaspandana 2.0" in Vidhana Soudha.Over 20,000 people attended the event to seek relief to their problems.In what is billed to be the first such mass grievance redressal programme held in Vidhana Soudha, department-wise stalls were set up at the venue to help the citizensThe grievances ranged from farmers seeking loan aid to patients seeking the funds to meet their needs. In a request that shocked the Chief Minister, a specially-abled woman requested him to grant her mercy death. The woman said she had no money and no kin to look after her.

A farmer from Raichur urged Siddaramaiah to provide discounts on tractors. The farmer, Eeranna, alleged that the district commissioner only provided discounts to those who were close to MLA Shivangouda Patil Naik. Siddaramaiah announced Rs 1 lakh medical aid on the spot to an eight-year-old boy N Krishna from Kolar district suffering from prolonged illness. He also gave Rs 50,000 compensation to Lokesh Puttanayak, who was involved in an accident. Over 12,372 aggrieved people registered their complaints. It is the highest complaint received by the revenue department.

Rajesh, a guest lecturer, travelled from Arakalagud taluk of Hassan. He said PU guest lecturers are neglected over degree professors. "Out of nine months, we get only seven months' salary, and when a permanent lecturer is recruited we become jobless overnight," he said.

Meanwhile, small business owners from Shivamogga requested Siddaramaiah to grant loans without delay. "If we wait for district administration to solve our issue, it will take years for them to fix our problems," said Raja N of Ambedkar Abhivruddi Nigama.The event was also attended by hundreds of differently abled people who requested the ministers for jobs and housing. Suresh AP from Bengaluru with a 40 per cent disability in his leg said, "It is hard to be consistent at a job due to my disability, it would be helpful if I get a house."

Siddaramaiah had held a similar exercise on 27 November last year at his home office 'Krishna'. A total of 936 police personnel -- eight ACPs, 23 Inspectors, 58 Sub-Inspectors, 205 Police Constables, 142 Woman Police Constables, and 500 Home Guards -- were deployed for the event.

—Salar News

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah during Jana Spandana 2.0 at Vidhana Soudha on Thursday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Depts that received most complaints

Revenue	3,150
Housing	1,500
Women and Children Welfare	903
Social Welfare	870
Primary Education	670
Urban Development	600
Rural Development and Panchayat Raj	520

Lack of letter writers a major woe at the event

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

A large number of illiterate people found themselves in a tricky situation as they were not able to write their woes on paper to be submitted to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah during the Janaspandana programme here on Thursday.

Kousalya, a house help from Bengaluru, told **Salar News**, "We do not know how to read and write but we have travelled for 35 kilometres to air our problems. People at the counter are not willing to help us."

Nagaraj, a patient from Ballari suffering from hip stiffness, said: "We are willing to pay if someone can write us a letter to list our grievances. We have travelled far just to meet Siddaramaiah."Hundreds of people were seen wandering outside the Vidhana Soudha looking for someone to help them express themselves on paper. 60-year-old Parvathamma, said, if the government is hosting such programmes they know people from all walks of life will be present, so they should arrange something to help people note down their issues.

Several people also said they missed a day's work and paid bus and train ticket fares just to meet Siddaramaiah. "If we do not get to give him our grievance, then it is all a waste," a participant said.

—Salar News

DKS SLAMS BJP

DKS: Suresh not allowed to raise issues in Parl

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar accused BJP of stifling the voice of MP DK Suresh in Parliament regarding injustices faced by Karnataka on Thursday. Speaking to reporters in Delhi, he expressed dismay over the adjournment of the session.

"The session was immediately adjourned after BJP MP Tejasvi Surya's speech, depriving Suresh, Congress MP from Karnataka, of an opportunity to speak." Shivakumar criticised BJP MPs for not advocating for Karnataka's interests in Parliament and asked them to be ashamed of their silence. He highlighted the presence of Karnataka's representatives in Delhi to voice concerns for the state, contrasting it with BJP MPs' reluctance to do the same.

Responding to allegations by BJP leaders questioning the accuracy of Karnataka government's financial figures, Shivakumar said that tax share data is based on factual data. Addressing the issue of budget allocations, Shivakumar questioned whether funds allocated for projects like the Upper Bhadra project and Bengaluru by the Centre had been released to the state. He criticised the Centre for not providing any funds for drought relief, despite detailed reports submitted by the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Revenue Minister.

Regarding Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statement on releasing Rs 6,000 crores for drought relief in Karnataka, Shivakumar said that no funds had been received from the centre. He announced plans for the Chief Minister to address this issue in the upcoming Assembly session.

—Salar News

DK Shivakumar *PHOTO: PTI*

> **The session was immediately adjourned after BJP MP Tejasvi Surya's speech, depriving Suresh, Congress MP from Karnataka, of an opportunity to speak**
>
> -DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

Encroachment looms over Tumakuru lake

TUMAKURU, 8 FEB

- Doddabanagere Lake is not only a vital water source but also a sanctuary for many diverse avian species

Doddabanagere Lake spanning across 400 hectares or 988 acres in Sira taluk is a lifeline for six neighbouring villages in Tumakuru. It helps in agriculture and provides groundwater.

However, concerns have been raised by BV Gundappa, President of Wildlife Awareness Nature Organisation, regarding the encroachment of approximately 10 to 12acres of lake's perimeter and has urged authorities to take legal action against people who are responsible. Additionally, he advocates for measures to restore lake's integrity, including the closure of trenches and preservation of its natural expanse, emphasizing the imperative of safeguarding this invaluable ecological asset for future generations. Encroachment issue has reports indicating the excavation of a deep trench in southern section of lake and the construction of a substantial embankment along stream's path, delaying natural flow of water into lake. A dam measuring 300mts long and 100mts wide has been built, worsening the situation by further obstructing the entry of water into the encroached area.

Alterations have been made to redirect the flow of rainwater, diminishing lake's capacity to absorb precipitation. This will be aggregate the risk of water scarcity.

Doddabanagere Lake is not only a vital water source but also a sanctuary for many diverse avian species.

—Salar News

MERCURY HITS 31.9ºC

It's just February but already feels like summer

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Mercury levels in the City witnessed a two-degree Celsius spike compared to the same time last year. While it was 30.4 degrees Celsius on the first week of February 2023, it has risen to 31.9 degrees on the same week of February this year.

According to Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), it is likely to get cooler in the coming days. According to IMD official A Prasad, similar conditions were seen last year as well. He told **Salar News**, "Compared to last year, this year's temperature is a bit high, but this will not continue for a long time."

He attributed the heat to El Nino effect, a climatic condition of the warming of the Pacific Ocean which pushes the temperatures up due to global warming. El Niño can cause drought conditions in India and Australia, which can impact crop productivity. It can even weaken monsoon winds and cause dry weather in India. While February was supposed to be a winter month, El Nino effect is making temperatures rise"The average rainfall in February 2023 was 7mm but due to the north westerlies, it has decreased to a vast numbers of 5mm this February This can trigger a chain reaction by making summer harsher than the previous year," he added. He also claimed that rapid urbanisation is another cause for the rise in temperature. *—Salar News*

According to experts, rapid urbanisation is another cause for the rise in temperature *PHOTO: PTI*

TBM Bhadra achieves breakthrough at KG Halli

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) Bhadra emerged out of the KG Halli Metro station on Thursday, completing the 22nd of the 24 tunnelling drives on the Pink Line.It completed its tunnel between Venkatesha pura and Kadugodi stations, marking its second breakthrough after 11 months of excavation covering 1185.8m

It was first launched from Venkateshpura on 24 June , 2021, to bore an 841.1m southbound tunnel towards Tannery Road. It completed the drive on 16 December, 2022. After this, Bhadra will be retrieved and launched for a 939m tunnel towards Nagavara from Kadugodi station Tunga, another tunnel boring machine, also finished its second breakthrough at KG Halli station. Tunga will now be deployed for its final 935m stretch from KG Halli to Nagavara too.

Completion of tunnelling is expected by the end of 2024. *—Salar News*

40 STUDENTS FALL ILL CONSUMING MID-DAY MEALS IN TUMAKURU

TUMAKARU, 8 FEB

More than 40 students and two teachers fell ill after consuming mid-day meals in Tumakuru on Thursday. The incident occurred at Sonnappanahalli in Kunigal taluk , where students of Amba Bhavani School consumed curd rice. Some were rushed to primary health centre in Ippadi village, while 12 were admitted to Kunigal Public Hospital. 13 students are undergoing treatment at Kunigal Hospital. *—Salar News*

Farmers call NAFED registration 'rigged'

TUMAKURU, 8 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

- First day of registration encountered a setback due to server issues, resulting in a slow pace with only 61 per cent of registrations completed

Commencement of National Agricultural co Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Limited (NAFED) centre in Tumakuru, has finally brought relief to local farmers. However, concerns have arisen regarding the fairness of the registration process, and distress among district's agricultural community.

First day of registration encountered a setback due to server issues, resulting in a slow pace with only 61 per cent of registrations completed.

Comparisons with Hassan district, which recorded double registration rate, have left the farmers questioning the integrity of the process.

Investigations revealed illicit practices in Hassan district, where additional computers and laptops were used with the same password, enabling a faster registration rate.

Marketing Federation MD, R Sridhar, has taken swift action by replacing staff and initiating an investigation to ensure transparency and fairness.

Central Government's directive to set up purchase centres through NAFED in seven coconut-growing districts underscores the importance of equitable registration practices. Any disparities could be a disadvantage to farmers across districts, impacting their livelihoods.

As of Wednesday, 38,373 tonnes of coconuts have been registered, nearing the total quota of 62,500 tonnes. However, disparities in registration rates could result in some farmers being unable to sell their coconuts to NAFED, posing a significant challenge to their income.

Farmers have warned of potential unrest if injustices in the registration process are not rectified. As authorities work to address these disparities and uphold principles of fairness, the plight of Tumakuru's coconut farmers remains a pressing issue that requires urgent attention. *—Salar News*

Plans to revamp historic Rani Mane in Gudnapur, Banavasi

KARWAR, 8 FEB

The historical legacy of Rani Mane in Gudnapur, Banavasi, is set to undergo a transformative makeover.

Deputy Commissioner and District Collector, Gangubai Mankar, is spearheading efforts to revitalize the site and elevate it into a prominent tourist destination.

Situated amidst picturesque surroundings, Rani Mane holds a historic past, serving as the abode of Kadamba dynasty's Maharajas and their families during the spring season.

In a bid to showcase this historical gem to public, Mankar issued directives to officials of Oriental Heritage Conservation Department to embark on a comprehensive development project for Rani Mane.

The restoration efforts will prioritise the meticulous repair of ancient enclosure walls surrounding the site, ensuring that the process is conducted with utmost sensitivity to preserve the integrity of the remains.

Plans include, installation of detailed information boards at entrance, explaining the site's historical significance and its relevance within the broader narrative of cultural heritage.

—Salar News

The restoration efforts will prioritise the meticulous repair of ancient enclosure walls surrounding the site *PHOTO: SALAR*

WHO'S PAYING FOR IT?

Free lavish breakfast to lure MLAs during Session

AMULLYA SHIVASHANKAR
BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Ghee Podi Idlis, Davangere Special Butter Dose, Akki Roti, Ragi Roti, Tatte Idli and Button Idli; this is not a menu of a popular restaurant in City but the menu for the breakfast that will be provided to the MLAs attending the upcoming Assembly Session.

For the first time in history, the State Assembly secretariat is providing a complimentary breakfast to all legislators throughout the Assembly session at Vidhana Soudha from 12 to 23 February. This unprecedented move is aimed at encouraging active engagement among Assembly members of both the Houses.

The move is aimed at encouraging active engagement among Assembly members of both the Houses *PHOTO: PINTEREST*

Ten restaurants have been roped in to provide sumptuous breakfast to the lawmakers. Ghee Thatte Idli, Ghee Podi Masala Dosa and Open Butter Masala from Rameshwaram Café; varieties of rotis from Halli Mane, Malleshwaram; and Benne Dose from Davangere Benne Dose, Mahalakshmi Layout, will be served piping hot to the MLAs and MLCs. Other restaurants including South Ruchi, IDC, Paakashala, JP Cordial and Sona Caterers, have also been given the contract to provide the breakfast. The breakfast will be served to around 300 people, including 224 MLAs and 75 MLCs.

Speaking to **Salar News**, Speaker UT Khader said, "More than 50 per cent of legislators do not have a residence in Bengaluru and they stay at Legislators' Home in Bengaluru. If the breakfast is served late there, the legislators will not make it to the Assembly on time."

"To avoid latecomers and to start the session on time, we have decided to serve breakfast in Vidhana Soudha. We called the Bruhat Bengaluru Hoteliers Association (BBHA) for a meeting and they gave us a list of restaurants and we settled for nine restaurants," Khader said. The restaurants are instructed to provide fresh and hot breakfast daily, including sweets, coffee and tea to all the legislators.

BBHA President PC Rao said the government collaborated with the Hoteliers Association to provide the breakfast. "Various food items, including the hotel's special for the day, will be served to the legislators. We thank the Speaker for the opportunity given to us," Rao said.

The restaurants are given a hall on the premises of Vidhana Soudha and are instructed to serve the MLAs in their seats, Rao said. *—Salar News*

RAHUL SAYS MODI NOT OBC, BJP CALLS IT 'BLATANT LIE'

RaGa alleges that Narendra Modi has been misleading people

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

BJP on Thursday rubbished as "blatant lie" Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's claim that Prime Minister Narendra Modi got his caste included in the list of Other Backward Classes (OBC) in Gujarat when he was the state's chief minister.

Gandhi with his remarks has hurt every member of OBC community and those who look up to Prime Minister Modi as their ideal, the party said and added that they will give the Congress a befitting reply in upcoming Lok Sabha polls. In his speech in Odisha, Gandhi said, "Modi ji has been misleading the people by saying that he is an OBC...

He changed his caste to OBC after becoming the CM of Gujarat. Therefore, Modi ji is not an OBC by birth," the Congress MP from Wayanad alleged.

"This is a blatant lie. Modi's caste was notified as an OBC on 27 October, 1999, a full two years before he became the Chief Minister of Gujarat," BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said posted on X and shared the weblink of the official notification.

"The entire Nehru-Gandhi family, starting from Jawaharlal Nehru to Rahul, have been against OBCs," he said. Malviya said OBC status first came into effect in India in 1992 after "the Supreme Court in the Indira Swahney judgement that year upheld the

Rahul Gandhi alleged that Modi changed his caste to OBC after becoming the CM of Gujarat **PHOTO: PTI**

government order issued in 1990 that caste was an acceptable indicator of backwardness".

Hence, it was not possible for any caste to be included in the OBC category before 1992, he said. BJP Rajya Sabha member Narhari Amin said he was the deputy chief minister of Gujarat when the Congress government in the state had notified "Modh-Ghanchi as OBC on 25 July, 1994".

Amin is a former Congress leader. BJP MP demanded that Gandhi "immediately withdraw his lies". "He should stop defaming OBCs and also apologise to the people of Gujarat for being filled with hate towards our popular prime minister, Narendra Modi," he said.

Lashing out at Gandhi, the MP said that "a person, who does not even know his 'gotra (lineage)', is today giving (an) OBC certificate to the prime minister born in a poor family and Teli community". "If this is not an insult to all socially backward people, then what is?" he asked.

Gandhi on Thursday hit out at BJP, alleging the ruling party's two-point programme is to encourage injustice and spread hatred and violence. *—PTI*

AAP declares 3 candidates for LS seats in Assam

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

AAP on Thursday announced three candidates for Assam for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls hoping INDIA bloc will allow them to contest from these constituencies. AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak announced the names of the three candidates - Manoj Dhanohar from Dibrugarh, Bhaven Chaudhary from Guwahati and Rishi Raj from Sonitpur. "We have full faith that INDIA bloc will accept it. But winning elections is most important. We are beginning preparations for these three seats immediately," he said. Pathak rued that there is less time remaining for the polls and stressed that with time running out, it will become difficult to contest polls. *—PTI*

DMK turns up in Lok Sabha wearing black robes in protest

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

DMK members on Thursday participated in Lok Sabha proceedings wearing black robes in protest against Centre over non allocation of requisite funds to Tamil Nadu in the interim budget. "We are wearing black robes in protest against Centre not releasing flood relief funds," DMK member G Selvamsaid. DMK has been raising the issue of non-allocation of funds for the last few days both inside and outside Parliament. Its leaders, TR Baalu and A Raja, have raised the issue during Question Hour and Zero Hour in the House. *—PTI*

Centre waging war against Oppn-ruled govts: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Delhi Chief Minister ArvindKejriwal on Thursday hit out at the BJP-led Centre, accusing it of waging a war against state governments led by Opposition parties.Leaders and lawmakers from the Left Democratic Front of Kerala, led by Chief Minister PinarayiVijayan, staged a protest against the Union government at Delhi's JantarMantar on Thursday.He alleged that the Centre is not giving funds to the state governments, using Governors and Lt Governors to meddle in the functioning of the state governments and unleashing central agencies on the Opposition leaders."It is depriving them of valid funds and obstructing work. It is also harassing them by using central agencies to arrest Opposition leaders. *—PTI*

Nyay Yatra to enter Amethi on 19 Feb

AMETHI, 8 FEB

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat JodoNyayYatra' will reach the Amethi parliamentary constituency which he represented earlier on 19 February, a party leader on Thursday said. Congress district general secretary Anil Singh said the yatra will start in the district from Atheha in Rampur assembly constituency of Pratapgarh district on February 19 and enter Kakwa. After that the yatra will leave for Rae Bareli via Maharajpur, Amethi, Gauriganj, Gandhinagar, Jais and Fursatganj, he added. Congress leader said Gandhi will during this address a big public meeting near BabuganjSagra Ashram in Amethi'sGauriganj, he said. Apart from this, Gandhi will also address the public at various places during the journey. He will stay the night in Fursatganj. The yatra, which began from Mainpur on 14 January, will enter Uttar Pradesh on February 16 and it will cover 20 districts in 11 days. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, whose party is an ally of the INDIA bloc, will be participating in the yatra in Rae Bareli. *—PTI*

Sitharaman moves Finance Bill 2024 in RS

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman moved Finance Bill 2024 for consideration in Rajya Sabha, on Thursday.

Finance Bill 2024 will be considered for returning to Lok Sabha which passed the bill on Wednesday. "I move that the bill to continue the existing rates of income tax for financial year 2024-25 and to provide for certain relief to taxpayers and to make amendments in certain enactments as passed by Lok Sabha be taken into consideration," Sitharaman said while introducing the Finance Bill 2024-25.

Appropriation Bill 2024, Jammu and Kashmir Appropriation 2 Bill, and

Finance Bill 2024 will be considered for returning to Lok Sabha which passed the bill on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Jammu and Kashmir Appropriation Bill 2024 were also moved by Sitharaman for joint discussion. Sitharaman also said the highlight of interim budget is the emphasis given by government on capital expenditure and sustaining pace of economic growth.

"With the capital expenditure being in the focus, in the last 3-4 years, we have made sure that our debt management is done in such a way that we honour the glide path for fiscal deficit that we had given in 2021," said minister. She emphasised that money spent on capital expenditure gives return compared to revenue expenditure.

Responding to criticism made by certain MPs on reduction in Budget allocations under various heads, Sitharaman said no major flagship programme has been curtailed nor she has reduced allocation. On the references made regarding Global Hunger Index, Minister said it is not a balanced approach to measure hunger and "Let's be conscious of it". *—PTI*

SC DENIES BAIL TO SEPARATIST IN UAPA CASE

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Supreme Court has refused bail to an alleged Khalistani separatist, member of Sikhs for Justice in UAPA case on Thursday.

A bench of Justices MM Sundresh and Aravind Kumar refused to interfere with Punjab and Haryana High Court's order refusing bail to Gurwinder Singh alias Gurpreet Singh Gopi in UAPA case probed by National Investigation Agency (NIA).On 10 July, 2019, pro-Khalistan group 'Sikhs for Justice' (SFJ), founded by Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, was banned by Centre. *—PTI*

R'than Budget: ₹1K cr for schools, colleges, hospitals

JAIPUR, 8 FEB

Provision of Rs 1,000 crore to establish and upgrade schools, colleges, hospitals, and administrative buildings, and recruitment to fill 70,000 posts were among the key announcements in Rajasthan's Interim Budget presented on Thursday.

Rajasthan Finance Minister Diya Kumari further announced Mukhyamantri Jal Swavlamban Abhiyan to create 5 lakh water harvesting structures in 20,000 villages over the next four years, for which aRs 11,200 crore provision has been made.

Kumari alleged that the former government ignored several Assembly constituencies. TheMinister said a Detailed Project Report to expand Jaipur Metro from Sitapura to Ambabari will be prepared in view of the problem of traffic congestion in Jaipur city.

Mukhyamantri Jal Swavlamban Abhiyan-2 will be started to create 5 lakh water harvesting structures in 20,000 villages in the next four years with a provision of Rs 11,200 crore, Kumari said.

During her speech, Kumari accused the former government of financial mismanagement, corruption, lack of vision, and held it responsible for the financial burden on the state and electricity companies.

The remarks triggered a ruckus in the House following which Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma requested members to listen to the Budget speech "by a woman finance minister". Leader of Opposition Tikaram Jully said there is no objection over the presentation of a vote on account by a woman minister but said it was inappropriate to make political allegations in it, and should stick to the Budget speech. *—PTI*

Former prime minister HD Deve Gowda on Thursday took a dig at the high command culture of the Congress **PHOTO: PTI**

'Will Congress tolerate Kharge becoming PM?'

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Former prime minister HD Deve Gowda on Thursday took a dig at the high command culture of the Congress and asked President Mallikarjun Kharge if the party would tolerate him becoming the Prime Minister of the country.

Taking part in the farewell to retiring members in Rajya Sabha, JD(S) leader Devegowda took exception to Kharge's remark that he changed his political course in the fag end of his life.His support to BJP was to save his party [JD(S)] from "some of the Congressmen" who wanted to destroy it, Deve Gowda said.

While acknowledging Kharge's honesty and the support he had extended to him during his political career, he blamed some Congress leaders for the fall of the Congress-JD(S) government in 2019, which was led by his son HD Kumaraswamy.

He claimed that despite his suggestion then that Kharge should become the Chief Minister of Karnataka and not his son, the Congress high command insisted that Kumaraswamy should be the chief minister.Deve Gowda further said," Kharge, do you want to become the prime minister of this country? Will Congress tolerate (it)? Please tell me, I know (the) Congress."

Devegowda said he has not jumped from one party to another in his life to get any personal gains.

"I want to save my party when some of the Congressmen want to destroy the party.

I have taken the decision to extend my support to BJP. That is the only reason," he said, and turning to Kharge, he added it was not for personal benefit.

The love and affection shown by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the only thing "which I have got as a benefit from the current prime minister", he said. *—PTI*

COURT ISSUES WARRANT AGAINST LOUISE

BAREILLY, 8 FEB

An MP-MLA court has issued arrest warrant against Louise Khurshid, wife of former external affairs minister Salman Khurshid in a case involving alleged misuse of government funds.Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Shambhavi of the special MP-MLA court on Wednesday issued an arrest warrant against two persons including Louise in this regard and fixed 16 February as the next date of hearing. *—PTI*

Parliament approves interim Budget 2024-25

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Parliament on Thursday completed the exercise of passing the interim Budget for 2024-25, with Rajya Sabha returning the Finance Bill 2024 and the relevant appropriation bills.

The Upper House also returned the appropriation bills related to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The bills were returned to Lok Sabha after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's reply on the discussion.

On Wednesday, Lok Sabha passed these bills.

Rajya Sabha returned

PHOTO: PTI

the Appropriation (Vote on Account) Bill, 2024;

The Appropriation Bill, 2024; The Jammu and Kashmir Appropriation (No.2) Bill, 2024;

The Jammu and Kashmir Appropriation Bill, 2024; and The Finance Bill, 2024. *—PTI*

Baba quits Cong to join Ajit Pawar-led NCP

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

Congress leader and former Maharashtra minister Baba Ziauddin Siddique, popularly known as Baba Siddique, on Thursday said he had resigned from the party and will be joining the AjitPawar led-NCP.

He is the second senior Mumbai Congress leader to leave the party in the last one month after former Union minister MilindDeora joined the Chief Minister EknathShinde-led Shiv Sena in January.

Siddique's son Zeeshan is a Congress MLA from the city, but the senior leader said the latter will take his own decision.The 66-year-old leader did not cite any reason for his decision to leave the Grand Old Party, only stating "some things are better left unsaid."

A prominent Muslim face of the Mumbai Congress,

Baba Siddique **PHOTO: PTI**

- Baba Siddique, on Thursday said he had resigned from the party and will be joining the Ajit Pawar led-NCP.

Siddique served as a Minister when Congress-NCP coalition was in power in Maharashtra.

"There's a lot I would have liked to express but as they say some things are better left unsaid. I thank everyone who has been a part of this journey," he added. *—PTI*

POST SOREN'S ARREST

ED summons Dhiraj in money laundering case

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has summoned Member of Rajya Sabha Madhya Pradesh (MP), Jharkhand Dhiraj Prasad Sahu for questioning in a money laundering case in which the central agency recently arrested former chief minister Hemant Soren,

Sahu is expected on 10 February at the ED office in Ranchi. ED to record Sahu's statement in connection with his purported links with Soren and a BMW SUV that was seized by the agency from the JMM leader's house in Delhi during searches last month.

Sahu, was in the news after the Income-tax department in December recovered Rs 351.8 crore cash, during raids against Odisha-based Boudh Distillery Pvt Ltd. (BDPL). According to ED sources, agency officials found the keys of the vehicle in the Jharkhand government leased residence in south Delhi and they took the SUV with them at the conclusion of the raids and parked it at their headquarters in Delhi.

"The agency also raided a premise in Kadarpur village in Gurugram on Wednesday on whose address this Haryana number plate bearing SUV is stated to have been registered. Two locations in Kolkata were also searched in the same case" said the sources.

ED suspects this vehicle to be allegedly linked to Sahu in an alleged 'benami' manner. Some other persons linked to the case have also been summoned by the agency for questioning and confrontation with Soren and another accused in the case- BhanuPratap Prasad, a former revenue department sub-inspector of the Jharkhand government. Soren was arrested by the ED on 31 January on money laundering charges in an alleged illegal land acquisition and possession case. *—PTI*

ED seizes ₹1.20cr cash, gold in raid against Rawat

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Enforcement Directorate said it seized Indian and foreign currency worth about Rs 1.20 crore, gold, during raids against Congress leader and former Uttarakhand Minister Harak Singh Rawat, on Thursday.

"Voluminous" documents were also seized from Rawat and his close associates as part of a money laundering investigation.

The searches were launched on Wednesday and a total of 17 locations in Uttarakhand, Delhi and Haryana were covered in a case against Birendra Singh Kandari, a "close associate" of Rawat, Indian Forest Service (IFoS) officer and former DFO Kishan Chand and former forest range officer Brij Bihari Sharma.

Kandari, a close associate of Rawat, and Narendra Kumar Walia hatched a "criminal conspiracy" with Rawat and got registered two powers of attorney for a land, for which a court had cancelled the sale deed.

They illegally sold this land, on which Doon Institute of Medical Science, Dehradun was constructed under Shrimati Poorna Devi Memorial Trust, to Rawat's wife Deepti Rawat and Laxmi Singh. The second instance stems from an FIR registered by vigilance department of state government against Sharma, Chand and others under various sections of the IPC, Forest Conservation Act, Wild Life (Protection) Act and Prevention of Corruption Act.They published a tender of a higher amount than the authorised financial powers and was not as per the rules/guidelines of the state government. They also "fabricated" documents and "misused" the funds under head of Tiger Conservation Foundation and Campa head and caused a wrongful loss worth crores of rupees to Uttarakhand government. *—PTI*

3,000 PEOPLE TO CAMPAIGN

'Overseas Friends of BJP' in US to make 25L calls to India during polls

WASHINGTON, 8 FEB

'Overseas Friends of BJP' (OFBJP) in US has made an elaborate plan to make more than 25 lakh calls to people across India.

This is to urge them to vote and re-elect Prime Minister NarendraModi for a third term with a record of 400 plus seats in 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

OFBJP in USA has also made plans to send a strong delegation of more than 3,000 Indian-Americans who will campaign for the party and its candidates in various capacities across India.

"We started preparations from December itself and we are picking up speed this month. In February, we are starting a kick-off event all over United States, probably around 20-22 cities cutting across 18 States. We are trying to gather not only sympathisers and volunteers of OFBJP but also general community, community leaders, who wants to see Modi 3.0," said OFBJP USA President Adapa Prasad.

OFBJP USA, will be presenting the achievements of Modi government in the last five years cumulatively and how India's position in global community of nations in the current situation, US India relations, and how overall growth has happened.

"I'm expecting almost 2.5 million calls," Prasad said, adding that this year OFBJP is expecting to send a delegation of 3,000 Indian Americans to campaign for the party in the general elections.

OFBJP USA is also planning to hold car rallies in different cities during the elections to create awareness about the developments and achievements in India in the last 10 years, he said. *—PTI*

OFBJP USA, will be presenting the achievements of Modi government in the last five years **PHOTO: PTI**

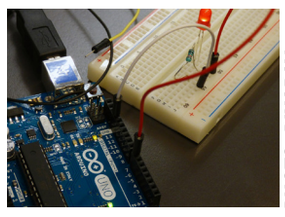


PHOTO: PIXABAY

Bilaspur gets Himachal's first robotic lab

BILASPUR, 8 FEB

The first robotic lab of Himachal Pradesh will be established at Jukhala centre of the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) in Bilaspur district.An official said, "A sum of Rs 20 lakh has been sanctioned in the first phase. The virtual lab, along with other installations, would soon be enabled for the school children to study science related subjects with ease."'Besides the educational trips from different schools, the lab would also be open for other people. APJ Abdul Kalam Science Center has already been established in DIET, Jukhala, and sustained efforts are being made to increase the interest of the children in science," the official added. *—PTI*

4 killed, 15 injured in road accident in WB's Raiganj

RAIGANJ, 8 FEB

The Police said, "Four persons were found dead and approximately 15 people were injured, after a speeding truck rammed into two vehicles and turned upside down in West Bengal's Uttar Dinajpur district."The accident took place late on Wednesday near Tungidighi Bus Stand at Karandighi on National Highway-12.The injured are undergoing treatment at the Raiganj Medical College and Hospital."The driver of the truck has also been hospitalised," the officer added. *—PTI*

Assam to file FIR for school uniform irregularity

GUWAHATI, 8 FEB

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday told the Assam Assembly, during the Question Hour, that the government after the Lok Sabha elections will start taking action as there are allegations of anomalies in school uniforms across the state.Sarma said, "We give funds for giving school uniforms to students free of cost. However, when I visit different places, I find that uniforms in some schools are of good quality and some are not.""Our aim this year is to provide good quality uniforms to every student of Assam. I request all MLAs to visit schools in their areas and grade their uniforms. I will take action against those who get a Grade C" he added.He also aims to provide hygienic mid-day meals. The issue was raised by AIUDF MLA Rafiqul Islam when Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) legislator Dharmeswar Konwar asked a question regarding irregularities in the mid-day meal scheme. *—PTI*

Terror attack in Srinagar: Injured Punjabi dies

SRINAGAR, 8 FEB

On Thursday officials said, "The death toll in the terror attack in Habba Kadal has risen to two as an injured worker, Rohit Masih from Punjab, succumbed to injuries at Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS) hospital."'He was shifted to the tertiary care institution late Wednesday night after his condition worsened at the Shri Maharaja Hari Singh (SMHS) Hospital," they addedOn Wednesday, another worker from Punjab, Amritpal Singh, had died in the terrorist firing at Shalla Kadal in Habba Kadal. It was the first targeted killing of the year.The terrorists had carried out three attacks on non-local workers in 2023. A circus worker was shot dead on 30 May in Anantnag district, brick kiln worker Mukesh Kumar from Bihar was shot dead by the ultras on 31 October in Pulwama district. *—PTI*

WB women prisoners give birth to 196 babies

Women got pregnant in prison, investigation on

KOLKATA, 8 FEB

The Calcutta High Court on Thursday ordered transfer to a criminal division bench of a matter in which the amicus curiae claimed that some women prisoners lodged in West Bengal's correctional homes were getting pregnant and 196 babies were staying at different such facilities.

Lawyer Tapas Kumar Bhanja, who was appointed amicus curiae by the court in a 2018 suo motu motion on overcrowding in prisons, submitted a note containing these issues and suggestions before the division bench presided by Chief Justice TS Sivagnanam.

Observing that the note pointed to "certain serious issues", the bench said it stated that women prisoners are getting pregnant while in custody.

The note by the amicus curiae stated that there are as many as 196 babies staying in different prisons of West Bengal.

Bhanja suggested prohibition of entry of male employees of correctional homes into the enclosures of women prisoners.

Note by the amicus curiae pointed that multiple women prisoners are getting pregnant while in custody PHOTO: PIXABAY

He submitted before the division bench, also comprising Justice Supratim Bhattacharya, that a copy of the note has been served in the office of the Advocate General of the state."In order to have an effective adjudication of all these matters, we deem it appropriate that the matter should be placed before the Hon'ble Division Bench having criminal roster determination," the court directed.The Chief Justice directed that the matter be placed before him for appropriate orders in this regard.A division bench presided by the then Chief Justice of the high court had in 2018 initiated a suo motu motion on overcrowding in correctional homes in the state.

- A division bench presided by the then Chief Justice of the high court had in 2018 initiated a suo motu motion on overcrowding in correctional homes in the state

Some related matters which were filed earlier and later were also tagged with the motion and are being heard together. *—PTI*

₹25L COMPENSATION

Portion of Delhi metro station collapses, 1 dead

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Locals gather after a fire broke out in shanties at Gokulpuri area, in New Delhi, Saturday morning PHOTO: PTI

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation on Thursday announced Rs 25 lakh in compensation for the family of 53-year-old man who died after a portion of the Gokulpuri Metro Station on the Pink Line in northeast Delhi collapsed, official statement said.

The DMRC announced Rs 5 lakh for the grievously injured and Rs 1 lakh for those who received minor injuries, it stated. The transporters also suspended two of its officials over the collapse.

"Two DMRC officials, a manager and a junior engineer from the civil department, have been immediately suspended," the statement read.

The transporter had initially announced an ex-gratia of Rs 50,000 for minor injury, Rs 2.5 lakh for grievous injury and Rs 15 lakh to the next of kin of the deceased. The figures were later increased.

The DMRC will be investigating the circumstances leading to this incident to take necessary remedial measures to prevent such unfortunate occurrences in the future, it said.

According to the statement, in an incident at the Gokulpuri Metro Station on Pink Line, a portion of the station wall towards 'up' platform fell on the road at 11.04 am on Thursday, injuring five persons.

They were rushed to the nearest hospital for medical attention.

"However, one of the injured unfortunately passed away," Anuj Dayal, principal executive director corporate communications of DMRC, said.

"Taking immediate cognisance of the unfortunate incident at Gokulpuri, DMRC's managing director Vikas Kumar has issued instructions to all the concerned departments in DMRC to conduct vigorous safety checks across the Delhi metro network," Dayal said.

The road was cleared of the debris within an hour of the incident to ensure seamless traffic movement, he said.

The executive directorvilO&M is at the site for a first-hand assessment of the situation apart from officials from all concerned departments, he said.

The DMRC officials are at the hospital ensuring all possible assistance to the injured. All details regarding the incident have been shared with the Commissioner of Metro Rail Safety (CMRS), Dayal said.As precaution, train services on the small stretch from Maujpur to Shiv Vihar are being run on single line to repair the fallen portion on the Gokulpuri station, which has also been temporarily closed.Train services on the rest of Pink Line are running normally, Dayal added. *—PTI*

DEVOTEES' TIME OF THE YEAR

Devotees cross a pontoon bridge over the Ganga river on the eve of 'Mauni Amavasya' during the ongoing 'Magh Mela' festival, at Sangam in Prayagraj on Thursday PHOTO: ANI

'India-B'desh ties role model for neighbourhood'

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

India's decision to fence its border with Myanmar will help it and the region in view of insurgency flowing from the troubled country, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud said on Thursday even as he asserted that Dhaka is firmly maintaining a policy of "zero tolerance" for terrorism.

In an interactive session at a think-tank, Mahmud described 1.2 million "forcibly displaced" Rohingya refugees as a "burden" on Bangladesh and sought India's assistance for their repatriation to Myanmar.

The visiting Minister said the refugees are creating environmental and security problems besides other difficulties for Bangladesh and that the Sheikh Hasina government has been in touch with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to check the flow of refugees.

To a volley of questions on the fairness of the recent parliamentary elections in Bangladesh, Mahmud said it was the most vibrant, participatory and fair polls in the country's history.

Mahmud is on a four-day visit to India from Tuesday, in his first bilateral foreign trip since Hasina came to power for a fifth term after a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections last month.

Describing the current state of relations between India and Bangladesh as a "golden chapter", he said the two sides are now giving highest priority to three aspects -- enhancing mutual trust and confidence, promoting connectivity and ensuring all round economic cooperation.

The Bangladesh foreign minister said the current situation in Myanmar is worrying and called India's decision to fence its border with that country as a good move. *—PTI*

- In an interactive session at a think-tank, Mahmud described 1.2 million "forcibly displaced" Rohingya refugees as a "burden" on Bangladesh and sought India's assistance for their repatriation to Myanmar

Lankan Navy nabs 19 Indian fishermen for illegal fishing

COLOMBO, 8 FEB

Sri Lanka has arrested 19 Indian fishermen and two trawlers for illegally fishing in the island nation's waters near Delft Island in northern Jaffna province, the country's Navy said on Thursday, in the second such incident this month.

The Sri Lanka Navy in the operation with the Sri Lanka Coast Guard on Wednesday also seized two Indian trawlers alongside the arrest of 19 Indian fishermen poaching in Sri Lankan waters, the Navy said in a statement.

The apprehended fishermen and their two trawlers were escorted to the Kankesanthurai Harbour and will be handed over to the Mailadi Fisheries Inspector for further action, it said.

The Navy continues to conduct regular patrols and operations in Sri Lankan waters to curb illegal fishing practised by foreign fishermen as they have a direct impact on the livelihood of locals, it said.

As an extension of these operations, the Northern Naval Command deployed Fast Attack Craft of the Navy and Coast Guard to chase away a cluster of Indian poaching trawlers which were engaged in illegal fishing in Sri Lankan waters close to the Delft Island.

So far this year, the Navy has arrested 88 Indian fishermen in the island's waters and seized 12 Indian trawlers, the statement said.

The Navy has handed them over to authorities for further legal action.

The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats in several alleged incidents of illegally entering Sri Lankan territorial waters.

The Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water separating Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka, is a rich fishing ground for fishermen from both countries.

There have been periodic instances of Indian fishermen being arrested by Sri Lankan authorities for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line and fishing in Sri Lankan waters.

In 2023, the island nation's Navy arrested 240 Indian fishermen along with 35 trawlers for allegedly poaching in Sri Lankan waters. *—PTI*

'MISSING TB CASES REDUCED TO 0.26 MILLION IN 2023'

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said that number of missing TB cases in India has reduced from 1 million in 2015 to 0.26 million in 2023.

Stop TB Partnership is hosted by UNOPS and is a collective force transforming the fight against TB, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said on Thursday. The remarks were made during a virtual address to the 37th Board Meeting of 'Stop TB' Partnership earlier this week."With less than 2 years left for India's target of 2025, our approach going forward is focusing on prevention while we saturate coverage of services in the detection and treatment of TB," he stated.

Mandaviya said, "TB has been a global health problem for decades now. *—PTI*

MP firecracker factory death toll rise to 12

HARDA 8 FEB

The death toll in blast at a firecracker unit in Harda in Madhya Pradesh reached 12 on Thursday after the body of an unidentified woman was found from a home near the site, while seven people continue to be missing, officials said.

A massive blast and subsequent blaze on Tuesday levelled a firecracker unit, leaving 11 dead at the time and more than 200 injured.

"The toll in the tragedy has reached 12 after the body of an unidentified woman was found in a house adjoining the blast site," Harda Chief Medical and Health Officer (CMHO) HP Singh said.

More than 200 persons were injured, of which 90 were discharged after treatment while 45 have been referred to hospitals in Bhopal, Indore and Naramadpuram, he said.

A massive blast and subsequent blaze on Tuesday destroyed a firecracker unit, leaving 12 dead in Madhya Pradesh PHOTO: PTI

The rest are being treated in the Harda district hospital, Singh added.

Additional District Magistrate Sadanand Gauda said seven persons have been reported missing by the families following the incident.

Meanwhile, officials said door-to-door search of houses in the area was continuing, with five sacks of firecrackers being found in one of them.

A team is also assessing damage to the houses in the vicinity so that residents can get assistance at the earliest, the officials said. *—PTI*

Women shine in Saudi defence show

NEW DELHI 8 FEB

The World Defence Show (WDS) 2024, currently being held in Riyadh, witnessed tri-service women's representation, a testament to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government's vision of leveraging Nari Shakti across domains, said an official statement from the Ministry of Defence on Thursday.

Squadron Leader Bhawana Kanth, Colonel Ponung Doming and Lieutenant Commander Annu Prakash represented the Armed Forces in the various seminars of the WDS 2024, especially in the International Women in Defence-themed events.

On 7 February, Squadron Leader Kanth, a fighter pilot from the Indian Air Force, took centre stage as a panellist at the seminar titled 'International Women in Defence: Investing in an Inclusive Future', hosted by Saudi Ambassador to the United States Princess Reema bint Bandar Al-Saud."The Squadron Leader shared her inspiring journey of breaking barriers and soaring through the skies, thus becoming a part of the revered fighter pilot club in India. Her insights on leadership, resilience and the evolving role of women in modern warfare resonated with the diverse audience, who were impressed to know about her journey. She is the first female fighter pilot to take part in the Republic Day Parade (2021). She also participated in the Republic Day 2024 Flypast," the defence statement added. *—PTI*

FOR THE NEXT 14 MONTHS

IN-SPACe releases plans for 30 launches

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

India's space regulator IN-SPACe on Thursday said about 30 space launches, including seven by private startups Skyroot and Agnikul, are scheduled in the fourth quarter of 2023-24 and the next fiscal.

The Integrated Launch Manifesto for space launches announced by the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe) include seven launches related to the Gaganyaan mission, two launches each of ISRO's newest rocket – the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) and the warhorse PSLV developed by an industry consortium.

Chennai-based Agnikul Cosmos is scheduled to launch its first 3-D printed rocket Agnibaan-SOrTeD for the fourth quarter of the current fiscal year.

ISRO's Launch Vehicle Mark-III (LVM3) M4 rocket carried 'Chandrayaan-3' PHOTO: PTI

The maiden flight of the Agnibaan rocket will be a sub-orbital mission.

The other launches this fiscal year include that of GSLV-F14 to put the INSAT-3DS satellite in orbit to augment weather forecasting, disaster management, and related meteorological services.

The third development flight of SSLV is also expected to be by March and it will carry a primary satellite of ISRO and two other payloads, Space Rickshaw and IITMSat, the INSPACe said.

Aerospace is expected to carry out four launches of its home-built rocket Vikram-1-1 during the next fiscal while Agnikul Cosmos has lined up two launches of Agnibaan.

In 2024-25 ISRO will undertake three missions each of PSLV and GSLV and seven launches related to the Gaganyaan project, including the test vehicle.

The NewSpace India Limited, the commercial arm of ISRO is expected to carry out four launches of PSLV, one LVM-3 mission and two launches of SSLV.Some start-ups such as Digantara Research & Technology, Dhruvaspace, Space Kidz India and academic institutes including IIT-Madras, Manipal Institute of Technology and CV Raman Global University Odisha have lined up launches during the next fiscal. *—PTI*

RED FLARE

Billowing smoke and flowing lava are seen pouring out of a new fissure during a volcanic eruption on the outskirts Grindavik, Iceland, on Thursday
PHOTO: PTI

Globe breaks heat record for 8th straight month

For the eighth straight month in January, Earth was record hot, according to the European climate agency.

That was obvious in the northern United States, where about 1,000 people were golfing last month in a snow-starved Minneapolis during what the state is calling "the Lost Winter of 2023-24."

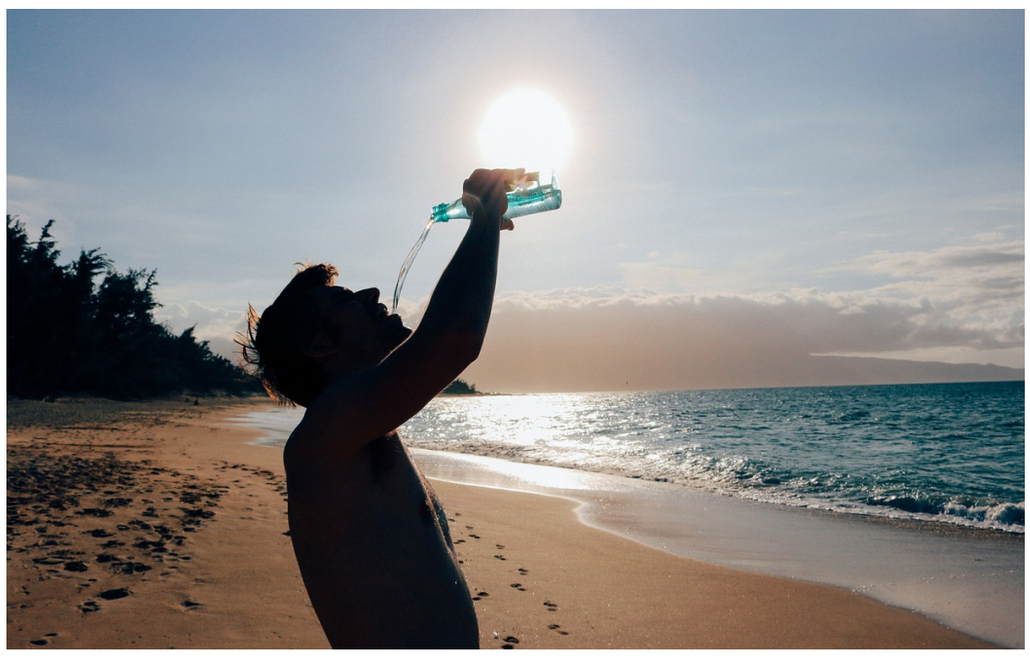
For the first time, the global temperature pushed past the internationally agreed upon warming threshold for an entire 12-month period, with February 2023 to January 2024 running 2.74 degrees Fahrenheit (1.52 degrees Celsius) hotter than pre-industrial levels, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service of the European Space Agency. That's the highest 12-month global temperature average on record, Copernicus reported.

The globe has broken heat records each month since last June.

January 2024 broke the old record from 2020 for warmest first month of the year by 0.22 degrees Fahrenheit (0.12 degrees Celsius) and was 3 degrees Fahrenheit (1.66 degrees Celsius) warmer than the late 1800s, the base for temperatures before the burning of fossil fuels. Even though it was record hot in January, the level above normal was lower than the previous six months, according to Copernicus data.

Climate scientists blame a combination of human-caused warming from the burning of fossil fuels and a natural but temporary El Nino warming of parts of the Pacific, saying greenhouse gases have a much bigger role than nature. This is the time of year that El Nino warming often peaks, said Texas A&M University climate scientist Andrew Dessler.

Just because the globe exceeded the 1.5-degree warming threshold for 12 months, that's not what scientists mean by reaching the warming limit of 1.5 degrees, said Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald, co-author of a United Nations science report about the harms of exceeding more than 1.5 degrees. The 1.5-degree limit, adopted by the 2015 Paris climate agreement, is more about 30-year averages.International Falls, a Minnesota city on the Canadian border that proudly bills itself as the "icebox of the nation," recorded its first-ever 50-degree high for January on Jan. 31, when the temperature hit 53 Fahrenheit (11.7 Celsius). Minneapolis has already set a record for the number of 50-degree days for a winter.



For the first time, the global temperature pushed past the internationally agreed upon warming threshold for an entire 12-month period, with February 2023 to January 2024 running 1.52 degrees Celsius ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

About 70 per cent of the Minnesota currently has bare ground, with most of the state so far getting less than 25 per cent of normal snowfall.

Authorities have rescued dozens of ice anglers from normally solid northern Minnesota lakes after ice floes broke off and carried them along. The annual Art Shanty Projects festival on Lake Harriet in Minneapolis in January had to be cut short due to open water and unsafe ice.

The Montgomery National Golf Club, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) south of Minneapolis, should be blanketed under a thick layer of snow this time of year. Instead, it's doing a booming business.

In Wisconsin, fourth in the US in maple syrup production, the mild winter weather prompted many farms in the state's northern and central regions to begin tapping their trees in mid-January — up to two months earlier than normal, depending on the area, said Theresa Baroun, executive director of the Wisconsin Maple Syrup Producers Association.

"There's a wide range of the state that are tapped and cooking syrup already. It's very unusual. This is one of the most abnormal weather patterns for starting out the maple season we've seen," she said Wednesday. "For maple trees to run, it needs to be freezing at night, above freezing during the day. And this weather has been perfect for the maple trees to run."

Baroun, whose family has about 1,200 maple trees at their Maple Sweet Dairy in De Pere, Wisconsin, just south of Green Bay, said the farm began cooking sap this week and that's the earliest her family can remember since production began in 1964.

The February sturgeon season on Michigan's Black Lake was canceled for the first time due to lack of ice for safe fishing.

At Isle Royal National Park, an island in Lake Superior between Michigan, Minnesota and Canada, scientists couldn't conduct their annual wolf and moose count because the ice was so weak they couldn't land ski-planes on it to get there.

One of the stranger consequences has been the early emergence of ticks.

The Metropolitan Mosquito Control District in Minnesota reported its first deer tick of 2024 on Monday, posting a creepy photo on social media of a tick in a vial against the backdrop of 5 February on a calendar. District officials said they haven't found any mosquito larvae yet -- but it's not from a lack of searching. *—AP/PTI*

SALAR ساڈن

Why 'Right to disconnect' laws are a necessary fix

Australian workers are set to have the right to disconnect from their workplaces once they clock off for the day.

This will "empower workers to ignore work calls and emails after hours (from their employers), where those demands are unreasonable", according to Greens Senator Barbara Pocock who has been driving the change.

Last week, the Senate committee reviewing the "Closing Loopholes" amendments to the Fair Work Act recommended introducing a right to disconnect to support "the development of clear expectations about contact and availability in workplaces". On Wednesday, the Albanese government indicated it supported the amendment.

Why a right to disconnect is needed

Last year, the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care drew attention to "availability creep" where employees are increasingly expected to complete work outside of work hours.

Smartphones have made it easier for managers to contact workers any time. The shift to remote working during the pandemic caused the boundaries between work and personal life to disintegrate further.

According to a 2022 report by the Centre for Future Work, 71 per cent of workers surveyed had worked outside their scheduled work hours often due to overwork or pressure from managers.

This led to increased tiredness, stress or anxiety for about one-third of workers surveyed, disrupted relationships and personal lives for more than one-quarter, and lower job motivation and satisfaction for around one-fifth.

Parliamentary inquiries have highlighted the negative consequences of working outside scheduled hours for mental and physical health, productivity and turnover.

Availability creep has led to significant unpaid overtime which "takes workers away from a fair day's work for a fair day's pay".

The impacts are especially acute for certain groups of workers. Those on insecure contracts lack the power to resist availability creep. Those with unpaid care responsibilities are likely to experience intensified work/life balance.

"Roster justice"

The right to disconnect provides a solution to these challenges. The Senate select committee on work and care found such a right can provide workers with "roster justice" by giving more certainty over their working hours.Many countries in Europe, Asia, North America and South America have already established laws or regulations limiting employers contacting workers outside work hours.At least 56 enterprise agreements currently operating in Australia provide a right to disconnect. This includes agreements covering teachers, police officers and various banks and financial institutions. Industrial Relations Minister Tony Burke has indicated the right to disconnect legislation will provide employers with "reasonable grounds" to contact their employees outside work hours. This might include calling employees to see if they can fill a shift.

If an employer "unreasonably" expects employees to perform unpaid work outside of normal hours the commission may be empowered to impose a "stop order" — and potentially fines — to prevent the employer from contacting employees outside hours according to Tony Burke.

Unions including those representing teachers and police officers support a right to disconnect. According to the Police Federation of Australia:

Not only do the police see that trauma, deal with the families' trauma, deal with their colleagues' trauma, have to investigate, have to go to court, and get media attention but they also have to go home and deal with their families (...) The right to disconnect gives those officers that little bit of breathing space.Employment law experts and human resource specialists also believe there is a strong case for such a right given the negative impacts of availability creep on worker well being.

Employer associations are less supportive. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) told a recent a Senate inquiry a right to disconnect would be "a blunt instrument which will do more harm than good, including for employees".

They claim employers will be less accommodating of employee requests for flexible work arrangements during normal work hours if contact outside these hours is no longer allowed.

A banana republic?

According to ACCI chief executive Andrew McKellar, a right to disconnect would be "the final step in Australia becoming a banana republic".

But it must be remembered that workers effectively had the right to disconnect before the smartphone. Such a protection needs to be explicit now technology has eroded the once-firm boundaries between work and home.

As the nature of work and employer practices change, it's essential for employment regulations to respond accordingly. Having a right to disconnect to protect workers from employers encroaching upon their free-time is a necessary response.

Courtesy, The Conversation

The shift to remote working during the pandemic caused the boundaries between work and personal life to disintegrate further ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

LETTERS Write to us at salar@salar.news

Why the law against exam malpractice could be ineffective?

Cheating is prevalent in the country due to the intensely competitive nature of government jobs and top college admission tests, where millions vie for a limited number of positions ***PHOTO: PTI***

Parliament has passed a stringent new law to prevent cheating in exams for government jobs and admission to public colleges.

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 - which was passed on Tuesday - carries a jail sentence of three to 10 years for those who facilitate cheating.

It also carries a fine ranging between 1 million rupees ($12,040; £9,551) and 10 million rupees.

The new law does not impose penalties directly on test takers; instead, their punishments will be determined by the rules set forth by their respective testing authorities.

The law will be applicable to most exams conducted by the federal government and its test agencies.

All offences are non-bailable and will be investigated by senior police officials.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government has said the act will bring "greater transparency, fairness and credibility" as it is the first federal legislation to prevent malpractices in examinations.

But critics argue that severe punishment alone won't effectively address the issue, noting instances of cheating and impersonation already punishable under India's criminal laws.

Hundreds of aspirants continued their protest outside the Staff Selection Commissions (SSC) office at CGO Complex demanding that Central Bureau of Investigation conduct an investigation into the alleged paper leak and mass cheating in the Combined Graduate-Level (CGL) Tier II examination, on

"The new law could prove to be ineffective because coaching centres collude with students to help them pass entrance examination," says Ghanta Chakrapani, former chairman of a state-run organisation which recruits people for state government jobs.

In 2022, India's top investigative agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), arrested a Russian hacker for reportedly breaching the entrance exam for admission to the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). The hacker allegedly worked for a coaching institute.

Cheating is prevalent in the country due to the intensely competitive nature of government jobs and top college admission tests, where millions vie for a limited number of positions.

For the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) exam, the entrance test for the federal civil service, over a million people applied last year for just over 1,000 job vacancies. The Joint Entrance Examination (JEE), which determines admissions to IITs, sees tens of thousands of applicants annually for just over 15,000 available seats.

In response to exam manipulation, several states have implemented laws to curb cheating. Rajasthan enacted an anti-cheating law two years ago, while Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have had such laws since 1998 and 1997, respectively.

Last year, Gujarat and Uttarakhand also introduced laws to prevent cheating.

Despite the existence of these laws, cheating cases have persisted in each of these states until recently, indicating their limited effectiveness.

India also reports question paper leaks periodically, leading to cancellation of exams.

An investigation by The Indian Express newspaper had found 41 documented cases of question paper leaks in job recruitment exams across 15 states over the last five years.

However, "high quantum of punishment cannot be a one stop solution for the cheating menace," says Jacob Punnoose who worked as a top ranking officer in the Indian police service before his retirement.

Cheating can be prevented by tightening security at examination centres, Punnoose says. "It's possible to use mass surveillance digital technology to prevent cheating by just monitoring students who take the examination."

India, however, has reported an emerging trend of young candidates using inventive and mischievous ways of cheating using digital technology.

In Rajasthan some used slippers with embedded Bluetooth devices to share test answers with accomplices outside the examination hall. Recently, 30 candidates were arrested in Tamil Nadu for using Bluetooth earphones to cheat in an Indian customs service examination, reports say.

Laws targeting cheating have proven ineffective, partly due to "organised criminals" with influential connections disrupting examinations, say experts. People who facilitate cheating often have political ties. In Karnataka, a police recruitment exam was investigated last year as a governing party leader was accused of facilitating mass cheating at an examination centre, resulting in over 65 arrests.

In India, disputes over public examination results can linger for years. Two years ago, violent protests erupted over alleged inaccuracies in the results of a railway recruitment test, leading to the suspension of the exam.

Some 700,000 candidates were shortlisted for just over 35,200 posts in this exam.

"The new law does not make it difficult to cheat. It just makes those caught, face stringent punishment," Chakrapani says.

—BBC News

PHOTO: AP

NASA satellite blasts off to survey oceans, atmosphere

CAPE CANAVERAL, 8 FEB

NASA's newest climate satellite rocketed into orbit Thursday to survey the world's oceans and atmosphere in never-before-seen detail. SpaceX launched the Pace satellite on its USD 948 million mission before dawn, with the Falcon rocket heading south over the Atlantic to achieve a rare polar orbit. The satellite will spend at least three years studying the oceans from 676 km up, as well as the atmosphere. It will scan the globe daily with two of the three science instruments. A third instrument will take monthly measurements. The observations will help scientists improve hurricane and other severe weather forecasts, detail Earth's changes as temperatures rise and better predict when harmful algae blooms will happen. NASA already has more than two dozen Earth-observing satellites and instruments in orbit. But Pace should give better insights into how atmospheric aerosols like pollutants and volcanic ash and sea life like algae and plankton interact with each other.*—AP*

Guinea's PM is 1st Pacific leader to address Aus parl

SYDNEY, 8 FEB

Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape on Thursday became the first Pacific leader to address Australia's parliament, vowing "nothing will come in between our two countries". The nations announced that Australia will spend USD 65.3 million on Papua New Guinea's internal security, including the development of a police recruiting and investigation training facility and a police barracks. The speech, Marape's meeting with his Australian counterpart, Anthony Albanese, and the neighbours' release of details of a security pact signed in December, come as Pacific nations deal with China's growing ambitions. Resource-rich Papua New Guinea has rebuffed overtures from China, which struck a security pact with the Solomon Islands in 2022 that caused worry among some in the region. Papua New Guinea, which is in a strategically important part of the South Pacific, struggles with tribal violence and civil unrest and wants to increase its police numbers from 6,000 officers to 26,000. Anger over high unemployment and cost of living led to rioting and looting last month in its two biggest cities. *—AP*

PHOTO: AP

'Dior bag scandal' political manoeuvre: S Korea President

SEOUL, 8 FEB

Spy camera footage of South Korea's first lady accepting a luxury bag gift was leaked as a "political manoeuvre", President Yoon Suk Yeol said. Yoon said the act was "regrettable" but stopped short of apologising. He has been under pressure to address the issue, which has roiled his ruling party ahead of key elections in April. His first comments on what local media has called the "Dior bag scandal" disappointed citizens and angered the opposition. Late last year, left-wing YouTube channel Voice of Seoul published a video that purportedly showed first lady Kim Keon Hee accepting a $2,200 Dior bag from a pastor, who filmed the exchange in September 2022 using a camera concealed in his watch. "The video [was made public] at a time when the general election is drawing near, a year after the issue happened, so we can see this as a political manoeuvre," Yoon told broadcaster KBS. ***—BBC News***

Capitol attack: SC hears on kicking Trump off ballot

WASHINGTON, 8 FEB

US Supreme Court on Thursday will hear former President Donald Trump's appeal to remain on the 2024 ballot, the justices' most consequential election case since Bush v. Gore in 2000.

The court will be weighing arguments over whether Trump is disqualified from reclaiming the White House because of his efforts to undo his loss in the 2020 election, ending with the 6 January, 2021, attack on the US Capitol.

The case marks the first time the justices will be considering a constitutional provision that was adopted after the Civil War to prevent former office-holders who "engaged in insurrection" from holding office again.

It sets up precisely the kind of case that the court likes to avoid, one in which it is the final arbiter of a political dispute.

The Colorado Supreme Court ruled that Trump incited the riot in the nation's capital and is ineligible to be president again. As a result, he should not be on the ballot for the state's primary on 5 March, the court ruled. It was the first time that Section 3 of the 14th Amendment was applied to a presidential candidate.

Colorado Supreme Court ruled that Trump incited the riot in the nation's capital *PHOTO: AP*

Trump's lawyers argue that the amendment can't be used to keep Trump off the ballot for several reasons.

For one thing, they contend the 6 January riot wasn't an insurrection, and even if it was, Trump did not participate. The wording of the amendment also excludes the presidency and candidates running for president, they say. Even if they're wrong about all of that, they argue that Congress must pass legislation to reinvigorate Section 3.

The lawyers for Republican and independent voters who sued to remove Trump's name from the Colorado ballot counter that there is ample evidence that the events of 6 January constituted an insurrection and that Trump incited it. They say it would be absurd to apply Section 3 to everything but the presidency or that Trump is somehow exempt. And the provision needs no enabling legislation, they argue.

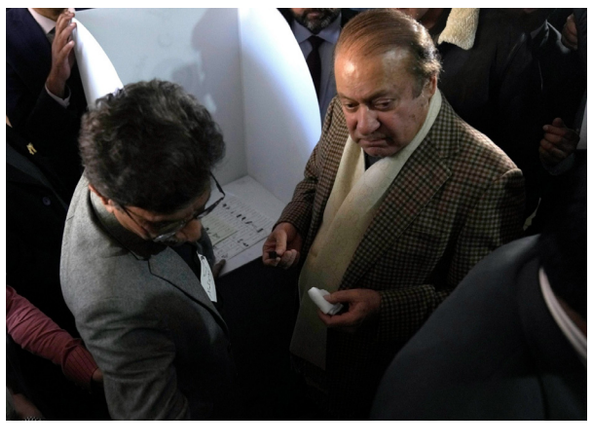
A definitive ruling for Trump would largely end efforts in Colorado, Maine and elsewhere to prevent his name from appearing on the ballot.

A decision upholding the Colorado decision would amount to a declaration from the Supreme Court that Trump did engage in insurrection and is barred by the 14th Amendment from holding office again. That would allow states to keep him off the ballot and imperil his campaign.

The justices could opt for a less conclusive outcome, but with the knowledge that the issue could return to them, perhaps after the general election in November and in the midst of a full-blown constitutional crisis. *—AP*

51 terror attacks, 12 deaths, rigging, glitches mar Pak polls

Mobile services were suspended as situation on poll day worsened



A woman casts vote during the general elections, in Pakistan on Thursday; An officer of polling staff helps Nawaz Sharif, right, to mark on ballot paper to cast his vote at a polling station for the country's parliamentary elections, in Lahore *PHOTO: PTI*

ISLAMABAD, 8 FEB

People in Pakistan on Thursday voted in the general elections in which former prime minister Nawaz Sharif is hoping to secure a record fourth term with the backing of the powerful military.

At least 12 people, including 10 security personnel, were killed mostly in restive Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, as the government forces repulsed 51 terrorist attacks aimed at disrupting the polling for general elections in the country.

The polls are being held amid a crackdown on his rival Imran Khan's party and terror attacks on security personnel.

Amidst tight security, the polling started at 8 am and will continue without any break till 5 pm.

Soon after the voting started, mobile services in Pakistan were suspended due to the "deteriorating security situation", a day after twin terror attacks killed at least 30 people in Balochistan province.A vehicle of the security forces was attacked by unknown persons with a rocket in the area of Mir Ali in the North Waziristan district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Several politicians in the country immediately demanded the restoration of mobile and internet services. The border crossing with Afghanistan and Iran will also remain closed both for cargo and pedestrians on Thursday due to security reasons. A countrywide public holiday has been declared to enable a total of 128 million registered voters to cast their votes and elect a new government that they hope will stabilise the country's economy.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), a total of 5,121 candidates are in the race for the National Assembly (NA) seatsAt many polling stations, the staff also complained about a shortage of ballot papers and incorrect papers leading to a long delay in the voting process.

A scuffle has been reported between Sharif-led PML-N and Imran Khan-led Tehreek-e-Insaf PTI in NA-49 Attock, leading to a temporary suspension of polling at two polling stations. After a delay of approximately five hours, polling resumed at both locations. With former prime minister Imran in jail, Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is tipped to emerge as the single largest party in the elections. *—PTI*

Taliban allegedly attacks 3 female polling agents

Islamabad, 8 Feb

Pakistan-based National Democratic Movement (NDM) Chairman Mohsin Dawar saidthree female polling agents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Tappi have been attacked by the Taliban during the ongoing general elections. However, the three women escaped the blast very narrowly. NDM leader Dawar further asked the District Returning Officer (DRO) to change the polling stations in Tappi, however, his letter was ignored. *—PTI*

Imran casts vote through postal ballot

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and other political leaders who are currently incarcerated have cast their votes through a postal ballot from Adiala Jail, Pakistan-based Dawn reported, citing sources. Imran Khan's wife, Bushra Bibi, was unable to vote

PTI says its polling agents were arrested

Imran Khan's party on Thursday claimed that polling in several areas of Pakistan's Punjab province of Pakistan began on Thursday without the presence of its agents, some of whom were picked by the police to make rigging easier in the elections. "At several polling stations in the constituencies, including those of Nawaz Sharif, his brother and daughter the polling even began without the presence of the polling agents of the PTI in Lahore," party leader said.

Haiti PM urges calm as protests seek ouster

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 8 FEB

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry urged calm in a public address early Thursday following three days of violent protests that have paralysed the country demanding his resignation.

The brief speech did little to appease thousands of people angry and frustrated over unrelenting gang violence, deepening poverty and no general elections in sight.

He urged Haitians not to look at the government or at Haiti's National Police as their adversaries. Those who choose violence, destruction and killing people to take power are "not working in the interests of the Haitian people," he said. His comments come as thousands of Haitians gathered daily this week in cities and towns across the country to demand that Henry step down, saying they will keep protesting until he leaves. Haiti's legislature is empty, after the terms of its last 10 senators expired in January 2023. The country failed to hold elections in 2019 and 2023, and Henry assumed power with the support of international community. *—AP*

PUTIN CHALLENGER BARRED FROM RUSSIA'S PREZ POLLS

MOSCOW, 8 FEB

Russia's Election Commission has rejected anti-war challenger Boris Nadezhdin as a candidate in next month's presidential vote.

Nadezhdin has been relatively critical of Vladimir Putin's full-scale war in Ukraine and few dissenting voices have been tolerated in Russia.

He had tried to challenge claims by the election commission that more than 15 presidential of the signatures he submitted with his application were flawed. But the commission rejected his bid. Refusing to give up, Nadezhdin said on social media that he would challenge the decision in Russia's Supreme Court.

Boris Nadezhdin *PHOTO: PTI*

"I collected more than 200,000 signatures across Russia. We conducted the collection openly and honestly." Central Election Commission said that more than 9,000 signatures submitted by Nadezhdin were invalid.

That left 95,587 names, meaning he was just short of the 100,000 required signatures to register as a candidate, Andrei Shutov said. Russia's presidential election is due to take place from 15-17 March, although the result is not in doubt as only candidates approved by Kremlin are running.

—BBC News

India thinks US is weak, sided with Russia: Nikki

Nikki Haley and Narendra Modi *PHOTO: PTI*

WASHINGTON, 8 FEB

Indian-American Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley has said that India wants to be a partner with the US but considers it "weak" and is playing "smart" by staying close to Russia from where it gets a lot of their military equipment.

"I have dealt with India too. I have got to say, I have dealt with India too. I have talked with (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi. India wants to be a partner with us. They don't want to be a partner with Russia," Haley, 52, said.

Haley, the only Republican candidate in the race for the party's nomination against Donald Trump, said that New Delhi has played smart in the current global situation and stayed close to Russia. "The problem is, India doesn't trust us to win. They don't trust us to lead. They see right now that we're weak. India has always played it smart," he said. *—AP*

MORE AND MORE CONFLICT

US drone strike kills Iran militia leader in Iraq

WASHINGTON, 8 JAN

A senior commander of an Iran-backed militia has been killed in a US drone strike in Baghdad.

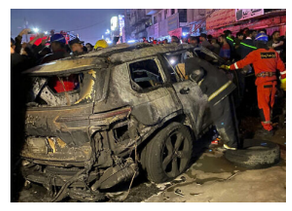
A leader of Kataib Hezbollah and two of his guards were in a vehicle when it was targeted in the east of the Iraqi capital. All three of them died.

The Pentagon said the commander was responsible for directing attacks on American forces in the region. The US has linked the militia to a drone attack in Jordan that killed three US troops last month.

In the wake of that attack, Kataib Hezbollah said it was suspending attacks on American troops to prevent "embarrassment" to the Iraqi government.

Wednesday night's drone raid happened in Baghdad's Mashtal neighbourhood, sparking several loud explosions. It was a precise strike on a moving vehicle in a busy street and the car was reduced to a fiery wreck. One of the victims has been identified as Abu Baqir al-Saadi, a senior commander in Kataib Hezbollah.

The raid comes days after the US launched 85 strikes in the Iraq-Syria border area in retaliation for the fatal 28 January drone attack on American troops at a base in Jordan.



Civil defense members gather at the site of a burned vehicle targeted by a US drone strike in east Baghdad *PHOTO: AP*

President Joe Biden described last Friday's wave of attacks as just the beginning of the US response.

The drone raid in the Iraqi capital will be seen as a major escalation.

But it was perhaps inevitable that the American strategy would include targeting not only infrastructure used by the groups, but also their senior leaders. Shortly after Wednesday's attack, militias in the country called for retaliation against the US. Harakat al Nujaba - another group blamed for attacks against American troops - released a statement promising a "targeted retaliation", adding that "these crimes will not go unpunished," according to AFP.

—AP

Bibi rejects Hamas' terms for Gaza ceasefire

RAFAH, 8 FEB

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected Hamas's proposed ceasefire terms - saying "total victory" in Gaza is possible within months.

He was speaking after Hamas laid out a series of demands in response to an Israel-backed ceasefire proposal. Netanyahu said negotiations with the group were "not going anywhere" and described their terms as "bizarre".

Talks are continuing to try to reach some sort of deal. Israel was expected to take issue with Hamas's counter-offer, but this response is a categorical rebuke, and Israeli officials clearly see an effort by Hamas to end the war on its terms as utterly unacceptable.

An Egyptian official source told the BBC that a new round of negotiations, mediated by Egypt and Qatar, is still expected to go ahead on Thursday in Cairo.

Hamas put forward its counter-offer to a ceasefire proposal on Tuesday.

The proposed deal would also see deliveries of food and other aid to Gaza increase. By the end of the 135-day pause in fighting, Hamas said negotiations to end the war would have concluded.

Israeli forces to push into Rafah

Netanyahu also confirmed on Wednesday that Israeli forces have been ordered to prepare to operate in the southern Gaza city of Rafah - where tens of thousands of Palestinians have fled in order to escape the fighting.

Expanding the conflict into Rafah would "exponentially increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare" in the city, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned. *—AP*

INDIANS SHINE IN US

Bhavini Patel goes from food truck to US Cong

WASHINGTON, 8 FEB

From helping her single parent mother running a food truck "India on Wheels" in Pittsburgh to launching a tech startup after completing her education from the Oxford University, Indian American Bhavini Patel is now running for US House of Representatives.

Patel, 30, last year on 2 October announced her decision to run for Congress from the 12th Congressional District of Pennsylvania, which is currently held by her Democratic party colleague Summer Lee.

Over the years, Lee has become unpopular in her district for some of the extreme positions that she has taken on several issues.

Notably, Congresswoman Lee is one of the few lawmakers who had boycotted the historic Joint Address to the US Congress by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June last year.

Patel, 30, last year on 2 October announced her decision to run for Congress *PHOTO: X/DNAPGH*

Preparing for her first hurdle of the primary, scheduled for 23 April, Patel has raised over USD 310,000, of which she says roughly 70 per cent has been raised from within the State.

In addition to that, she has also got endorsements from roughly 33 elected officials, including mayors of small towns as well as members of council in those areas.

Patel is a die-hard Biden supporter. "To be quite honest, I think he's one of our most progressive presidents that we've seen" she said, referring to some of the key bills that his administration has been able to deliver, including infrastructure bill, Inflation Reduction Act, and Chips and Sciences Act. Originally from Gujarat in India, her mother came to this country as an immigrant. Patel soon became the first in her family to graduate from college.

- Preparing for her first hurdle of the primary, scheduled for 23 April, Patel has raised over USD 310,000, of which she says roughly 70 per cent has been raised from within the State

While she has been running a very positive campaign in her district, Patel of late has been a target of hate crime and racial abuse because of her ethnicity.

Following this, Hindu and Jewish groups across the country have come out in her support. Hindu American PAC recently held a fundraiser for her.

Patel is a strong advocate of India-US relationship. "Our relationship with India is very critical. I think there's a burgeoning young population there. There's a lot of hunger and desire to build a life and to contribute to the growth of India, but also globally there's a lot of talent. So how can the United States, particularly how can Western Pennsylvania best position itself to attract that talent?" she said. *—AP*

RBI PROJECTS 7% GROWTH FOR NEXT FINANCIAL YEAR

It is based on improved consumption demand, pvt capex spends

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

The Reserve Bank on Thursday projected GDP growth for the next financial year at 7 per cent on the back of improved household consumption and upturn in private capex cycle.

The real GDP growth is, however, lower than 7.3 per cent estimated by the National Statistical Office (NSO) for the current 2023-24 fiscal aided by strong domestic economic activity and investments.

The Indian economy grew 7.2 per cent in 2022-23 fiscal. In its Monetary Policy Statement, 2023-24, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said the recovery in rabi sowing, sustained profitability in manufacturing and underlying resilience of services should support economic activity in 2024-25.

"Among the key drivers on the demand side, household consumption is expected to improve, while prospects of fixed investment remain bright owing to upturn in the private capex cycle, improved business sentiments, healthy balance sheets of banks and corporates; and government's continued thrust on capital expenditure," Das said.

The improving outlook for global trade and rising integration in the global supply chain will support net external demand. The RBI flagged headwinds from geopolitical tensions, volatility in international financial markets and geo-economic fragmentation as risks to growth outlook.

"Taking all these factors into consideration, real GDP growth for 2024-25 is projected at 7 per cent with Q1 (April-June) at 7.2 per cent; Q2 at 6.8 per cent; Q3 at 7.0 per cent; and Q4 at 6.9 per cent. The risks are evenly balanced," Das said.

—PTI

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das delivers the Monetary Policy Statement, at RBI headquarters on Thursday ***PHOTO: PTI***

RBI keeps lending rate unchanged at 6.5%

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

The Reserve Bank of India on Thursday decided to keep policy rate unchanged for the sixth time in a row in view of global uncertainty and the need to bring down retail inflation to 4 per cent.

Following RBI's decision to maintain status quo, banks and financial institutions will largely keep lending rates stable.

RBI had last raised repo rate in February 2023 to 6.5 per cent after six consecutive rate hikes aggregating to 250 basis points since May 2022.

Announcing the decision of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said it has decided to keep the policy repo rate unchanged on the basis of an assessment of the current and evolving macroeconomic situation.

MPC also decided to remain focused on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation progressively aligns to the target while supporting growth, he said.

These decisions are in consonance with the objective of achieving the medium-term target for Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation of 4 per cent within a band of +/- 2 per cent while supporting growth. For 2024-25, RBI has projected a growth rate of 7 per cent and retail inflation at 4.5 per cent with risks evenly balanced. The real GDP growth for the next financial year is projected at 7 per cent with Q1 growth at 7.2 per cent, Q2 at 6.8 per cent, Q3 at 7 per cent and Q4 at 6.9 per cent.

—PTI

Action against Paytm bank was in customers' interest: RBI

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said there are no systemic worries and the action on Paytm was driven by a "lack of compliance" at Paytm.

Deputy Governor Swaminathan J said the actions against the fintech have been taken due to "persisted non-compliance". The Governor declined to specify the specific shortcomings resulting in the RBI action, but made it clear that it is driven by a "lack of compliance" at Paytm.

Stressing that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is a responsible regulator, Das asked why should the central bank act against a regulated entity if it has complied with all the requirements. The RBI works with entities on a bilateral basis, nudges them to comply by giving sufficient time, and imposes business restrictions or supervisory actions only when the entity does not take necessary actions, Das said.

"When constructive engagement doesn't work or when the regulated entity does not take effective action, we go for imposing business restrictions," Das said, adding that the actions are "proportionate" to the gravity of the situation. The actions are driven by systemic stability or protection of depositor or customers' interests, he added.

The Governor also affirmed the Reserve Bank's commitment to support innovation in the financial sector, saying there should not be "any doubt" around it. PTI

RBI NOW MANDATES KEY FACT STATEMENT FOR ALL

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has extended the requirement of a key fact statement to all retail and MSME loans in a bid to enhance transparency.A Key Fact Statement is a document that clearly explains lending terms. It has key information regarding a loan agreement, including the all-in-cost of the loan, in a simple and easy-to-understand format.At present, the loans and advances availed by borrowers, apart from including the rate of interest, also include other fees and charges such as processing fees, and documentation charges, said RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das in his monetary policy statement. Reserve Bank had mandated certain categories of lenders to provide the borrower a KFS containing essential data. *—PTI*

INCREASED UNCERTAINTY

Erasing all its early gains, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 723.57 points or 1 per cent to settle at 71,428.43 ***PHOTO: PTI***

Market tanks after RBI monetary policy decision

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty tanked around 1 per cent on Thursday dragged by selling in banking and auto shares due to increased uncertainty about the timing of interest rate cuts after the RBI's monetary policy decision.

Erasing all its early gains, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 723.57 points or 1 per cent to settle at 71,428.43. The barometer slipped into red after the announcement of the RBI monetary policy and hit a low of 71,230.62 thereafter, reflecting a loss of 921.38 points or 1.27 per cent.

The Nifty shed 212.55 points or 0.97 per cent to settle at 21,717.95. The RBI Monetary Policy Committee on Thursday decided to keep policy rate unchanged for the sixth time in a row in view of global uncertainty and the need to bring down retail inflation to 4 per cent. The RBI also maintained its 'withdrawal of accommodative stance'.

Announcing the decision of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said it has decided to keep the policy repo rate unchanged on the basis of an assessment of the current and evolving macroeconomic situation. MPC also decided to remain focused on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation progressively aligns to the target while supporting growth, he said.

"Though FY25 GDP growth forecast has improved, the RBI remains vigilant on inflation & banking liquidity. The incomplete transmission of the cumulative 250 bps and the inflation ruling above the target level add uncertainty about the timing of the interest rate reduction. The ripple effect was seen in the government 10 yr yield, which inched higher.

"A large pocket of the market slid into red like FMCG, banks, and auto. FMCG was impacted more by weak Q3 result and downgrade in volume growth, in the near-term, due to weak rural demand," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

—PTI

Rupee settles on a flat note at 82.96 after RBI decision

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

The rupee settled on a flat note at 82.96 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, after the Reserve Bank decided to keep the key policy rate unchanged for the sixth time in a row to maintain a tight vigil on inflation. Forex traders said a negative trend in domestic equities weighed on investor sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 82.94 against the dollar and moved in a narrow range and settled for the day at 82.96 against the American currency, as the central bank retained the repo rate at 6.5 pc for the sixth consecutive time. During the day, the rupee touched an intraday high of 82.89 and a low of 83 against the US dollar. On Wednesday, the rupee appreciated 9 paise to close at 82.96 against the dollar. The Indian rupee remained flat as RBI maintained status quo in its monetary policy for the sixth consecutive time and left Repo Rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent, in line with street expectations.*—PTI*

Gold slips Rs 70; silver remains flat

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Gold price slipped Rs 70 to Rs 63,300 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a fall in precious metal prices in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal prices had finished at Rs 63,370 per 10 grams in the previous trade. However, silver remained flat at Rs 74,600 per kilogram. HDFC Securities' Senior Analyst of Commodities Saumil Gandhi said spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,300 per 10 grams, down by Rs 70, taking cues from the overseas markets. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,029 per ounce, down by USD 4 from the previous close. However, silver was trading marginally higher at USD 22.29 per ounce. *—PTI*

Zomato posts ₹138 cr net profit in Q3

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Online food delivery firm Zomato Ltd on Thursday reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 138 crore in the December quarter. The company had posted a consolidated net loss of Rs 347 crore in the same quarter last fiscal, Zomato Ltd said in a regulatory filing. Consolidated revenue from operations in the third quarter of the ongoing fiscal stood at Rs 3,288 crore as against Rs 1,948 crore a year ago, it added. Total expenses were higher at Rs 3,383 crore. The same was Rs 2,485 crore in the corresponding period a year ago, the company said. *—PTI*

Disney boss bets future on Fortnite & Taylor Swift

WASHINGTON, 8 FEB

Disney's chief executive, Bob Iger, has announced a series of moves which he hopes will bring "significant growth" to the entertainment giant. The plans include streaming an exclusive version of Taylor Swift's Eras Tour concert movie on Disney+. The firm will also invest $1.5bn (£1.2bn) in Epic Games, the maker of the hugely popular video game Fortnite. Disney has been under pressure from activist investor Nelson Peltz, who has called for a shakeup of the business.The US billionaire wants Disney to boost profits from its streaming business as well as improve the box office performance of its films. Last year, a number of Disney films, including those from its Marvel franchise, failed to ignite the global box office. In its results for the three months to 31 December, Disney said that its streaming service had shed 1.3 million subscribers following a price increase in October. *—BBC News*

THERMAX PROFIT JUMPS 88% TO RS 237 CR IN Q3

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Thermax on Thursday posted nearly 88 per cent jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 237.06 crore in the December quarter, mainly on the back of higher revenues.

Its consolidated net profit was Rs 126.40 crore in the year-ago period, a BSE filing showed.

Total income rose to Rs 2,382.76 crore in the quarter from Rs 2,091.57 crore a year ago.

The company's board approved additional capex of Rs 45 crore to set up an ion exchange resin manufacturing plant at Jhagadia, Gujarat.

As of December 31, the order balance for the quarter was Rs 10,717 crore as compared to Rs 9,859 crore in the previous fiscal, up 9 per cent, it stated.

The order booking for the quarter under review was Rs 2,506 crore, 14 per cent higher than Rs 2,204 crore in the last fiscal, it stated. *—PTI*

CODE WITHOUT BARRIERS

Microsoft to train 75,000 Indian women in coding

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Microsoft Chief Satya Nadella on Thursday announced the expansion of Microsoft's 'Code Without Barriers' programme to India, aiming to train 75,000 women developers by 2024.

The programme is to democratise access to tech skills nationwide, the chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Microsoft said, as he spoke about the impact Indian developers are making in accelerating AI innovation globally during his address to 1,100 developers and technology leaders at the Microsoft AI Tour here.

"One of the things that I'm very excited also is to bring one of the initiatives which we've had called Code Without Barriers, and expanding to India and really helping 75,000 women developers by 2024," Nadella said.

According to Microsoft, "Code Without Barriers" programme will be expanded to India this month, as the company aims to democratise access to tech skills nationwide. "The programme was launched in 2021 across nine Asia Pacific (APAC) countries to help close the gender gap in the region's fast-growing cloud, AI, and digital technology sectors.

"It provides support, training, and networking opportunities for female developers and coders, and those in other technical roles to contribute to inclusive economic growth, encourage innovation, and reflect the region's social makeup," the statement said. Microsoft said it will provide skilling and certification to 75,000 women developers in India in 2024 under the programme.

—PTI

Satya Nadella said the programme is to democratise access to tech skills nationwide ***PHOTO: PTI***

Equity mutual fund inflow hits almost 2-year high of ₹21.7 crore

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Equity mutual funds experienced a net inflow of Rs 21,780 crore in January, making it the highest monthly infusion in nearly two years, propelled by investors' continued preference for small-cap funds. In comparison, an inflow of around Rs 17,000 crore was seen in the category in December, according to the data released by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) on Thursday.

The flow in January was the highest since March 2022, when equity-oriented mutual funds witnessed an inflow of Rs 28,463 crore. Also, the latest flow marks the 35th consecutive month of net inflows in equity funds.

Barring value fund, all categories experienced inflow in equity segments. The category was aided by fund collection to the tune of Rs 4,805 crore in thematic funds, followed by Rs 3,257 crore in small-cap funds and Rs 3,039 crore in multi-cap funds.

The highlight of this month was the fund flows into the large-cap category at Rs 1,287 crore, which was at the highest-level in more than 13 months. "With mid-caps at 15 per cent and small caps at 20 per cent premiums, investors are realising the considerable valuation gap with the large-cap segment, and accordingly making adjustments to their investments.

"Though small-cap funds garnered greater than Rs 3,000 crore of net flows for the fourth consecutive month, the quantum was lower by Rs 600 crore on a month-on-month basis," Gopal Kavalireddi, Vice President of Research at FYERS, said.

—PTI

The flow in January was the highest since March 2022 ***PHOTO: PTI***

- Equity mutual funds experienced a net inflow of Rs 21,780 crore in January, making it the highest monthly infusion in nearly two years, propelled by investors' continued preference for small-cap funds. In comparison, an inflow of around Rs 17,000 crore was seen in the category in December, according to the data released by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) on Thursday.

15 YEARS OF TRADE

India eyes $100B deals with Swiss, Norway

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

India is close to finalising a trade deal that could see a small group of European nations invest as much as $100 billion over 15 years for easier trade access to the country, Bloomberg News reported on Wednesday.

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which includes Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, made a commitment as part of a trade pact that is in final negotiations, Bloomberg reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

The investment in India from the EFTA countries will see more than 1 million jobs created in the country, the report said, adding that the investment would be aimed at existing and new manufacturing projects, and will mostly come from state-sponsored organizations and private businesses.

The trade deal will ensure market access for some agricultural projects, and guarantee easier movement of Indian professionals to EFTA countries, Bloomberg said.

India's Commerce Ministry and the EFTA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Last month, the country's Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told Reuters India is eyeing $100 billion in annual foreign direct investment (FDI) "in the next few years". India has been attracting investments from several countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, which is considering investing as much as $50 billion in the country.

—Bloomberg

The investment in India from the EFTA countries will see more than 1 million jobs ***PHOTO: BLOOMBERG***

- India is close to finalising a trade deal that could see a small group of European nations invest as much as $100 billion over 15 years for easier trade access to the country, Bloomberg News reported on Wednesday.

Airbus to make A220 doors in India

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Airbus has awarded a contract to an Indian company for manufacturing all the doors of its narrow body A220 family of aircraft, a significant development in expanding the 'Make in India' initiative.

The announcement was made at a function attended by Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and others here on Thursday.

The financial details were not disclosed.The contract has been awarded to Bengaluru-based Dynamatic Technologies, which already manufactures the Flap Track Beam of the Airbus A330 and A320 Family aircraft.

This is one of the single-largest export contracts for an Indian aerospace manufacturing company.It is the second doors-contract awarded by Airbus to an Indian supplier.In 2023, Airbus gave the contract for the manufacturing of bulk and cargo doors of the A320 family of aircraft to Tata Advanced Systems Ltd.

India is becoming a destination for aircraft component manufacturing activities, Scindia said.He said it is the right time for Airbus to invest in India and the plane maker will its sourcing of components. *—PTI*

Complete bowler Bumrah will be the best pacer of T20 WC: Vernon

JOHANNESBURG, 8 FEB

His ability to hold a line, bowl wicket-taking deliveries without leaking runs along with those lethal yorkers make Jasprit Bumrah the most complete bowler in international cricket, says former South African seamer Vernon Philander, who foresees the Indian outperforming all his contemporaries in this year's T20 World Cup in the Americas.

Bumrah on Wednesday became the first Indian pacer to be crowned number one in ICC Test rankings. This was after his magical performance in the second Test against England that yielded nine wickets on a sporting track at Visakhapatnam.

Philander, who has played 64 Tests for South Africa with 225 wickets against his name, said Bumrah doesn't seem to have any chinks in his armor. "Bumrah is the (most) complete bowler at the moment. He has got magnificent skills and he has also learned the trade of holding a line and length and that is the reason behind his success at the Test level," Philander told 'PTI Bhasha' in an interview on the sidelines of the SA T20 Tournament here.

"Initially, he wanted to bowl wicket-taking deliveries all the time and leaked runs but now he has learned consistency," he pointed out.

The T20 World Cup will be held in June across the West Indies and the USA and inaugural champions India would be among the title favourites.

Philander said the team will rely heavily on Bumrah as he has become the sort of bowler who can never be written off in the shortest format.

"He swings the new ball, brings the stumps into the play, and challenges the batters upfront. He is phe-

Jasprit Bumrah ***PHOTO:PTI***

Vernon Philander***PHOTO: AP***

nomenal with those change-ups and lethal yorkers and that is the skill set you want in the T20 World Cup," he explained. "I feel he is going to play a massive part in the tournament and perhaps also be the best seamer," said the veteran Philander, who is the second fastest ever to reach 50 Test wickets by touching the milestone in just seven games, was also full of praise for Bumrah's pace colleague Mohammed Shami and said that he "uses his seam beautifully". "...the way he has gone to dominate at the moment is really exciting to see. The plans he had adopted when he came to bowl in South Africa. It is a tough place to bowl and one has to change the mindset from bowling on the flat subcontinental pitches to bowling here," he said.

Philander said India seems to have cracked the code as far as producing good fast-bowling talent is concerned and a share of the credit goes to former captain Virat Kohli's vision.

"Every time India comes here, they seem to be performing better than the previous tour. In the subcontinent, Indian spinners have been winning the games but It's just good to see the Indian team winning in Australia.

"That's a very positive sign for India to produce those sort of bowlers... It is also on the back of great leadership. "Virat Kohli had been a strong leader who was propelling his bowlers to go and learn and get better," said the pacer, referring to India's historic Test series triumph against Australia in 2018-19 under Kohli. *—AP*

PHOTO: AP

Covid hits Australia skipper Marsh before T20 series

SYDNEY, 8 FEB

After testing positive for Covid-19, Mitchell Marsh will captain Australia from a distance when they take on West Indies in the first of three Twenty20 internationals on Friday, Cricket Australia said on Thursday. The all-rounder will be allowed to play the match at Hobart's Bellerive Oval. But he will have a separate dressing room and be forced to keep a distance from other players while on the field.Marsh was recently confirmed as captain for the three-match T20 series in New Zealand that follows the clashes against the West Indies, making him almost certain to retain the role for the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and United States in June.Josh Inglis and Cameron Green have both played internationals in recent weeks despite testing positive for Covid.*—AP*

PHOTO: AP

Daryl Mitchell to miss second Test against South Africa

CHRISTCHURCH, 7 FEB

Black Caps batter Daryl Mitchell will sit out the second Test with South Africa next week to be fit for the looming home series against world champions Australia, New Zealand Cricket said on Thursday. Mitchell played in New Zealand's crushing 281-run win in the first Test against the touring Proteas on Wednesday but will miss the second match, which starts Tuesday, with a persistent foot problem. The 32-year-old, who has hit five centuries in 31 Tests, will also miss all three Twenty20 games against Australia this month ahead of the home two-Test series with the touring world champions starting 29 February.*—AP*

PHOTO: AP

Indian women aim to turn the tide against USA

BHUBANESWAR, 8 FEB

Arresting the free-fall after a hat-trick of defeats will be the top-most agenda of the Indian women's hockey team as it gears up to face the United States in its fourth FIH Pro League 2023-24 clash here on Friday.Having failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics, the Savita Punia-led women's team's performance had gone from bad to worse in recent times. India lost 1-2 to China, followed by another 1-3 defeat at the hands of The Netherlands. The hosts lost their third match on the trot against the formidable Australia, who blanked them 3-0.
—PTI

Chelsea finally shows fighting spirit to ease Mauricio

LONDON, 8 FEB

Chelsea eased the spotlight on manager Mauricio Pochettino with a dominant 3-1 win at Aston Villa to reach the FA Cup fifth round on Wednesday, as Nottingham Forest set up a clash against Manchester United. Conor Gallagher, Nicolas Jackson, and Enzo Fernandez struck for the Blues at Villa Park to banish memories of a 4-2 home defeat to Wolves on Sunday. Chelsea were booed off by a disgruntled home support at the weekend as Wolves' rout followed a 4-1 thrashing at Liverpool a week ago.*—AP*

Djokovic set for Indian Wells return after 5 years

Nadal, a fan favorite, will be joining a star-studded field in the desert

PARIS, 8 FEB

In an attempt to capture a record-tying sixth title in the Indian Wells, World No. 1 and 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic will return to a return in BNP Paribas Open after a five-year hiatus. The five-time champion (2008, 2011, 2014, 2015, 2016) owns a tournament-record 20 consecutive match victories from his three-peat from 2014-2016. This week, the BNP Paribas Open revealed its player entry lists. The 2024 BNP Paribas Open, which will take place from 3 to 17 March at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden, features a star-studded field of former Indian Wells champions and up-and-coming talents.

Djokovic last feature at Indian Wells in 2019 ended with a third-round exit.

After losing in the Australian Open sooner than anticipated, World No. 2 and reigning BNP Paribas Open champion Carlos Alcaraz is returning to Tennis Paradise to regain the glory of his championship run from the previous year and find his footing.

Alcaraz dazzled the desert spectators last year, becoming the first person since Roger Federer in 2017 to win in Indian Wells without dropping a set.

Rafael Nadal, a fan favorite and three-time Indian

Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic ***PHOTO: AP***

Rafael Nadal ***PHOTO: AP***

Wells champion (2007, 2009, 2013), will be joining a star-studded field in the desert. Nadal will be returning to Tennis Paradise after missing the 2023 tournament due to injuries. The 22-time Grand Slam champion, who missed the Australian Open earlier this year due to an injury, will want to get his season off to a strong start.

Jannik Sinner, the 2024 Australian Open champion, is expected to start the season strong and hopes to maintain his momentum when he arrives in the desert. Sinner ranked fourth in the world, and did well in his debut season, losing in the semifinals to eventual champion Alcaraz.

Taylor Fritz, a native of Southern California, will once more take the lead among the top-ranked American players on the ATP Tour. *—AP*

Dallas Open: Tommy Paul and Ben Shelton cruise to victories

DALLAS, 8 FEB

Americans Tommy Paul and Ben Shelton cruised to victories Wednesday night to reach the quarterfinals of the Dallas Open.

The second-seeded Paul wore down Taro Daniel with long rallies and games on his Japanese opponent's serve in a 6-3, 6-2 win. Shelton, the No. 3 seed, used a dominant serve in a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Michael Mmoh.

Daniel saved five break points early in the first set before Paul finally got a break when Daniel ended one of the long rallies on his serve with a forehand into the net.

Paul converted the fourth break point in each of Daniel's first two service games in the second set, getting the second break after one of many long rallies on the Japanese player's serve.

Daniel had two break points in the next game, but Paul saved both and went on to hold serve for a 4-0 lead.

Shelton, who lost just three points on his serve, went up 3-0 in the first set with a break from Mmoh.

The servers had won the first 18 points of the second set when Shelton won three in a row on Mmoh's serve for a breakpoint before going on to break for a 3-2 lead.

Shelton, who lost to Novak Djokovic in the semifinals of the U.S. Open last year, went up 3-0 in the first set with a break from Mmoh.

The servers had won the first 18 points of the second set when Shelton won three in a row on Mmoh's serve for a breakpoint before going on to break for a 3-2 lead.

Shelton broke Mohr again for a 5-3 lead before the hard-serving left-hander closed out the match at love.

It was Shelton's first match of the week on the campus of SMU, while Mmoh had advanced with a first-round victory.

"I was pretty surprised with the level I played at today," said Shelton, who is ranked 16th. "It's always tough when you're around a tournament site for almost a week and kind of sit around waiting for your match." *—AP*

Prajwal Dev was recently named in India's Davis Cup squad as a reserve ***PHOTO: PTI***

Prajwal Dev gets wild card entry for B'luru Open

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Prajwal Dev, who was recently named in India's Davis Cup squad as a reserve, was on Thursday handed a wild card entry into the singles main draw of the Bengaluru Open, an ATP Challenger event starting 12 February.

The 27-year Dev had competed in the Bengaluru Open last year also but had fallen in the first round.

However, he is coming into the fresh season on the back of a decent show in 2023 in which he ended a runner-up at the ITF 15k event in Thailand and also reached the semi-finals in three other tournaments.

"I would like to thank KSLTA for the wonderful opportunity to play in the main draw. I am privileged to receive the wild card and I am looking forward to the tournament. Hopefully, I can do well. I am coming off a good week in Chennai and hopefully, I continue with that," said Prajwal, currently ranked 611 in the ATP rankings.

"Expectation is there and I am hopeful I will live up to that," he said.

The KSLTA will soon announce more main draw wild cards for the tournament which will conclude on 18 February.

"Prajwal has the potential to break into top-500 soon and we want to allow him to achieve the feat at the earliest. He is a very talented player, and support at the right time is what a player needs. We endeavor to support local talent," said Sunil Yajaman, the Tournament Director.

"We are delighted to give this opportunity to Prajwal. Hopefully, he will make full use of it," Yajaman further added. *—PTI*

AGE-GROUP WRESTLING NATIONALS RESCHEDULED

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The Under-15 and Under-20 National Championships, scheduled to be held in Gwalior next week, will now take place in Patiala from 28 February, the wrestling ad-hoc committee announced on Thursday. The ad-hoc committee, which is in charge of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), postponed the age-group nationals after some state associations expressed their inability to participate in the tournament at such short notice.The 2023 U20 and U15 freestyle, Roman style, and women's National Wrestling Championship was scheduled to be held at the Lakshmibai National Institute of Physical Education, Gwalior, from 11 to 17 February."The U20 & U15 Free Style, Greco Roman Style, and Women Wrestling National Championship has now been rescheduled to 28.02.2024 to 05.03.2024,". *—PTI*

Australia to face India in U-19 World Cup final

BENONI, 8 FEB

Tom Straker's six-wicket haul and Harry Dixon's fifty inspired Australia to a tense one-wicket victory over brave Pakistan in the semifinal here on Thursday, setting up their ICC Under-19 World Cup final against defending champions India.

The summit clash will be played at the same venue on Sunday.

Pakistan made a below-par 179, built around two half-centuries by Arafat Minhas (52) and Azan Awais (52) as they struggled against pacer Straker (6/24).

Despite having their struggles against spirited Pakistan bowlers, the Aussies managed to reach 181 for 9 in 49.1 overs to seal the final berth with Dixon (50, 75b, 5x4) and Oliver Peake (49, 75b, 3x4) leading their chase.

While India will be playing their ninth title match, the Aussies are appearing in their sixth final.

India has won a record five titles while Australia has bagged three titles, and the last time the Yellow Brigade lifted the trophy was in 2010 with a win over Pakistan. That edition was held in New Zealand.

However, Australia's win was anything but smooth as a bunch of determined Pakistan bowlers made them stretch for every single run.

—AP

Performance in IPL will have great significance: Tom Moody

CHENNAI, 8 FEB

Veteran coach Tom Moody on Thursday said the players' performance in highly competitive leagues like IPL and ILT20 will have an added heft this time because of the impact it can have on the team selection ahead of the T20 World Cup.

This edition of the marquee ICC event is scheduled to be held jointly in the West Indies and the USA in June and most of the teams, including India, have already finished their T20I assignments.

"The IPL (set to be played between March-May), along with any other T20 tournament, like the ILT20, is

Tom Moody ***PHOTO: PTI***

important for any player to be performing because every home team is looking at the performances of all their players in these tournaments because of the high-quality cricket in these (leagues)," Moody said during a virtual media interaction facilitated by the Desert Vipers team of the ILT20.

Moody then described how these outings could help players secure a berth in the World Cup-bound squads.

"If you are scoring runs, taking wickets, and showing consistency, it only puts you in a good position as an individual when it comes to those final tough decisions around the selection table.

"It allows you to continue with that sort of confidence, going into an important (T20) World Cup," Moody added.

Even India head coach Rahul Dravid has expressed a similar opinion recently.

"We might not get many opportunities to play together, so we will have to work around that. *—PTI*

FRENCH CUP

Mbappe scores again as PSG advances to q/f

MADRID, 8 FEB

Kylian Mbappe has scored his 30th goal of the season as Paris Saint-Germain advanced to the French Cup quarter-finals with a 3-1 win over Brest that stretched their unbeaten run to 15 matches.

Amid persistent rumors he will leave PSG to join Real Madrid after his contract runs out at the end of June, Mbappe has been in tremendous form this season. Last weekend, the France captain scored his 20th league goal in just 19 matches.

According to data by Opta, Mbappe has been involved in 50 goals in his 28 French Cup games - 35 goals and 15 assists.

He has scored 11 times in his last four matches in the competition.

Kylian Mbappe surges forward for PSG in their French Cup win over Brest in Paris ***PHOTO: AP***

But while Mbappe continues to impress, PSG remain fragile ahead of next week's meeting with Real Sociedad in the first leg of their Champions League round-of-16 tie.

Brest dominated early at the Parc des Princes and conceded against the run of the play.

The visitors had the upper hand until the 34th minute, hitting the post and forcing PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma into an excellent save before Bradley Locko gave the ball away to Ousmane Dembele on the left side of the box.

Moments later, Warren Zaire-Emery fed Mbappe, who broke the deadlock with a powerful right-footed shot from a tight angle.

Brest had their heads down and were punished a second time three minutes later when Danilo Pereira slotted home from Dembele's assist.

Mbappe missed a chance to make it 3-0 just after half-time on a swift counter-attack when his clever chip hit the bar. *—AP*

Sneha opens a five-shot lead over Hitaashee

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Sneha Singh ***PHOTO: PTI***

Sneha Singh carded a 3-under 69 to extend her lead over arch-rival Hitaashee Bakshi to five shots after round two of the fourth leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour. Sneha, winner of the Hero Order of Merit last season, registered a hat-trick of birdies on the back nine to recover from two bogeys.

Sneha with 70-69 is now 5-under 139 and leads Hitaashee Bakshi (72-72) who had a par round for the second straight day. Hitaashee is even par for two days as Sneha is the only player with under-par rounds on both days.

The day's amateur star was Zara Anand (74-72), who with three birdies in the last four holes rose to a Tied third spot alongside Khushi Khanijau (72-74). They are both at 2-over 146.

Sneha, who started the day two shots ahead of Hitaashee, birdied the second and the third to get off to a flying start. A bogey on the fourth was repaired with a birdie on the ninth.

On the back nine, Sneha seemed to have given away some ground with back-to-back bogeys on the 10th and the 11th. Yet she fought back strongly with a birdie on the 12th and then three in a row from the 14th to the 16th. *—PTI*